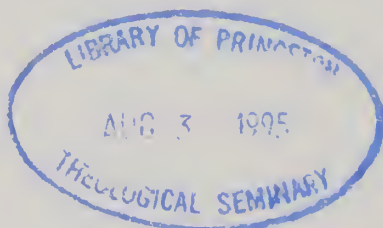



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THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

VOLUME XIV, NUMBER 3 NEW SERIES 1993

COMMENCEMENT 1993

The Messiness of Ministry

WILLIAM H. WILLIMON

You Bet Your Life

THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

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John 3:16

JAMES F. KAY

Bearable Visions/Unbearable Sights

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The Messiness of Ministry

by WILLIAM H. WILLIMON

The speaker at the 1993 commencement exercises of Princeton Theological Seminary, William H. Willimon is Dean of the Chapel and Professor of Christian Ministry at Duke University Divinity School.

Texts: Jeremiah 1:4-10
Luke 8:4-8

COLLEAGUES: IT is an honor for me to address you who are new to the Christian ministry.

There is much I do not understand about the faith and its practice (as any of you who are familiar with my work can attest). Yet after twenty years I do know one thing; I am up from the South to declare without reservation: *there is no way to be a pastor and to be neat*. Yes, you heard me. There is no way to be a pastor and to be neat.

A few years ago I did a book on “burnout” among clergy. Why, having once put their hands to the plow, do some quit? A man who had counseled troubled pastors in Texas declared to me that, after many years’ observation of pastors, he knew that *no one should go into the pastoral ministry who had previously been a professional photographer*. His theory: If you have a need to look at the world through a small aperture, if you need to get everyone fixed, in focus, you will be miserable in ministry. People just won’t stand still. You think you have got them pinned down, in focus, then they move.

This may come as bad news to those of you in the graduating class who have been professional photographers, now that you’ve spent all this time and money at Princeton, but trust me. Someday you will thank me. You can’t be a pastor and be neat.

The neatest pastor I ever knew was a Lutheran who served with me in a small town. He was excessively neat, always cleaning up after everyone, pencils all sharpened in a row on his desk, a personality like Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* who “wants the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever.”

I considered his ministry an affront to the blessed memory of his alleged spiritual forebear, Martin Luther, who, if his sermons are a fair indication of the mind of the man, was not the sort to be troubled by socks lying about the bedroom floor.

You will be pleased to hear that this fastidious, anal-retentive, obsessive-compulsive pastor had a complete nervous breakdown, and was forcibly taken from his church while screaming something about, “The Lutheran Women’s League *will never* hold another supper in our kitchen.”

There you have it. If you want your world neat, orderly, fixed, consider the Navy rather than the PC(USA). You'll be much happier as a librarian than as a pastor.

Even I, whose mother predicted he would never get married because of the condition of his dormitory room, had to be purged of small pockets of neatness and compulsion. My biggest jolt my first year out of seminary was the gap between my seminary-acquired categories of humanity and the rather haphazard way God had actually constructed people. Why was it that, in my congregation, I had people whose social attitudes were all cleaned up, progressive, forward thinking (similar to my own) whom I would not have trusted with my laundry, much less my life? And why were those, whose values were antediluvian, saints? It wasn't what I had been led to expect by the kind of ideological pigeonholing I had been taught in seminary. (I went to Yale, after all, where typological thinking is a way of life.)

"I tell you, give 'em a job digging ditches, or picking up garbage, and if they don't take it, let 'em starve."

I could hear him shouting to the gaggle of men outside my door that Sunday as I looked over my sermon, a sermon entitled, "Our Duty as Christians to Care for the Less Fortunate."

"Now here's a fine state of affairs," I thought to myself. "I'm preparing to preach the unadulterated gospel, and these hooligans in the church office are forming a lynching party for the poor. I'm going out there and give that deadbeat a piece of my mind."

I opened my door and called to the outer office, "Harry, come in here, I need to speak to you."

"Yea, preacher," Harry said, "I need to speak to you, too."

In my office he said, "Are you aware of what's going on in Haiti right now?"

"Haiti, why no . . ."

"Well they've had a terrible swine epidemic. All their pigs died. Maybe you didn't know it, but I've spent two of my last vacations down there helping those people build a clinic."

"I didn't know that," I said, thinking of the beach where I had spent my last vacations.

"Without pigs, they'll starve. So Martha and I have taken five thousand dollars out of our savings, and we want you to challenge the church to raise five thousand more so we can send breeder pigs to folk in Haiti."

I looked at his check. I recalled his comments only a minute before.

"Now, preacher what was it you wanted to tell me?"

I forgot my typological theology, took the check, and ran.
A mess! I can't be a pastor and be neat.

They asked Jesus, "Show us the Father," And in response, he portrayed a messy, divine recklessness at the very heart of reality:

A farmer went out to sow and he . . . carefully prepared the soil, removing all rocks and weeds, marking off neat rows, placing each seed exactly six inches from the other, covering each with three-quarters of an inch of soil?

No. This sower just began slinging seed. Seed everywhere. Some fell on the path, some on rocks, some in weeds, and some, miraculously, fell on good soil, took root, and rendered harvest. That's what the Word of God is like, said Jesus.

A farmer (as I recall, it was the same farmer) had a field. The servants came running in breathlessly; "Master, there's weeds coming up in your new wheat."

"An enemy must have done this!" cries the farmer.

Enemy, my eye. You get this sort of agricultural mess when you sow seed with such abandon.

"Do you want us to go out and carefully root up those weeds from your good wheat?" asked the servants.

"No, let 'em grow. I just love to see stuff grow. We'll sort it all out in September."

And Jesus said, "That's God's kingdom."

In his commentary on these parables, Calvin sees clearly that they are meant for clergy, concluding his interpretation by warning that it is vain to seek a church free from every spot.¹

Aquinas spoke of the "divine economy," and that's fine provided we understand that it is exorbitant economics for a woman who would tear her living room apart until she found her stray quarter, a father who plows ten grand into a welcome-home party for a prodigal, a shepherd called "good" for his willingness to lay down his life for a \$3.95-plus-postage sheep.

O dear graduates, forsake all thinking that is categorical; let go all theology that presumes to be systematic, but is an affront to the way this God runs a farm.

And don't go running for your Calvin in a futile effort to impose decency and order on this faith. In a wonderful passage in his *Institutes*, after confess-

¹ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:1028.

ing confusion at why God had created such useless but lovely materials like ivory, marble, and precious stones which are "attractive to us, apart from their necessary use," Calvin condemns as "inhuman philosophy" that perspective which celebrates only utility and "degrades [the human being] to a block[head]."²

Consult Calvin's celebration of God's "liberal abundance" in creating the Garden³ before you go believing Max Weber's slur that Calvinism was "worldly ascetism."⁴ "Nature would certainly be satisfied with water to drink," notes Calvin, but God's "superabundant liberality" invented wine.⁵

I can understand why there are Muslims who are called fundamentalist. I've read the Koran with its lists of duties, its directives for running a family, fighting a war, organizing a government. But for the life of me, I'll never understand why members of InterVarsity are attracted to the Gospel of John.

In biblical interpretation, form precedes function, and the Bible (surely one of the messiest, most disordered, wonderfully eclectic, marvelously chaotic books ever assembled by a committee) is the Word of God on the basis of sheer incomprehensibility alone.

Despite Calvin's claim that he looked into the heavens and saw there "beautiful order,"⁶ science is abandoning earlier delusions of nature as laws, fixed orbits, and its eighteenth-century cause-effect predictability. The world was created by the God of Israel, not an attorney. Yet that which evolutionists and physicists now call "chaos," we claim to be the purposeful work of a God who is playful, exuberant, large.

"Point us to the kingdom," they asked Jesus. And he replied, "A man gave a feast, spared no expense, got the best caterers in town, hired a band, sent out invitations to all his friends and cronies, and they began to make excuses." They are busy, cleaning out the garage, sorting their socks. They refuse.

And the Lord of the banquet gets real mad. So he sends out his servants a second time, telling them to bring in the poor, the maimed, the blind, the

² *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:721.

³ *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis*, trans. John King, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), 1:100.

⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 53, 149-154.

⁵ *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, 5 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1849; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 4:155.

⁶ *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 3:43.

lame—in short, those with nothing to do on a Saturday night. And they came.

And Jesus says the kingdom of God is like that. God's idea of church is a party with people you wouldn't be caught dead with on a Saturday night.

Just when I get my church all sorted out, sheep from the goats, saved from the damned, hopeless from the hopeful, somebody makes a move, gets out of focus, cuts loose, and I see why Jesus never wrote systematic theology.

Just when I settle down to keep house in the church, just me and my flock, Jesus says, "By the way, I have other sheep, who are not of this fold. I'm going to find them too" (Jn. 10:16).

So you and I can give thanks that the locus of Christian thinking appears to be shifting from North America and Northern Europe where people write rules and obey them, to places like Africa and Latin America where people still know how to dance.

And I think it's wonderful that most of you have spent time learning Greek, a marvelously *useless* language. You can't use Greek to build a "mega church," nor will it fold out into a bed. We make you learn Greek (now the truth can be told) not because knowing Greek has anything to do with successful Christian ministry, but in the hope that we will thereby render you so impractical that, having wasted so much time with a dead language, you may not balk at wasting an afternoon with an eighty-year-old nursing-home resident, or spending a Saturday listening to the life of a troubled teenager, or taking hours to write a sermon that no more than twenty will ever hear. It takes a good seminary about three years to break you of your pragmatic, neat utilitarianism, and I have every hope that Princeton has cured you of yours. You can't be a pastor and be neat.

"She could have gone to law school. Best undergraduate I ever taught," he said, as we veered off the main highway and made our way down a narrow country road in West Virginia. We pulled up before the little white frame Presbyterian church, with the sign hanging from a rusted chain, peeling paint, with the name of the church and, underneath, painted poorly, "The Rev. Julie Jones—Pastor."

And my friend said, "Damn, what a waste."

But the reckless farmer who slung the seed and the woman who pulled up her carpet and moved the living room furniture into the yard in pursuit of her lost quarter, the giver of the banquet for the forgotten, and the shepherd who threw away his life for the sheep, laughed with disordered gospel delight.

You Bet Your Life

by THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

Farewell Remarks to the Class of 1993
by the President of the Seminary

SIR JOHN Templeton, premier investment manager and trustee emeritus of the Seminary, is often asked to explain his stock market strategy. Recently he summarized his counsel by citing the famous advice given by Will Rogers. "Don't gamble," counseled the legendary comedian. "Buy some good stock. Hold it till it goes up . . . and then sell it. If it doesn't go up, don't buy it!"

Success in the stock market is based on the principle of buying low and selling high, as John Templeton observes. The Will Rogers quip is humorous because it assumes you can do both without risk. A riskless stock market, however, is an oxymoron. So is a ventureless life. For the conditions of our God-given existence include chance, risk, and danger. And that includes life in ministry.

Your studies at the Seminary have encouraged you, I trust, to think theologically of life in terms of election and providence, and of ministry in terms of vocation. That means we are believers in Jesus Christ and members of his church because God elected from eternity to love humanity in Christ. It means we live day by day as the beneficiaries of God's bountiful care and provision. It means we have pursued a seminary education because something within us sounded and continues to sound like God's call to some form of Christian service. These are convictions I hope you have grasped intellectually and internalized existentially.

Yet living and ministering in such a convictional context does not exclude the human conditions of chance, risk, and danger. On the contrary, divine election and providence and vocation are manifested and appropriated precisely under such conditions. The point is that there is no guarantee that you will always buy low and sell high. There is no assurance that you will receive the calls you desire or that your ministry will always flourish. There is no advance certainty that you will be admitted to a prestigious doctoral program, graduate *summa cum laude*, be appointed to a distinguished faculty, receive tenure, and write the definitive work in your field. But the absence of guarantees and assurance and certainty does not excuse us from pursuing "the impossible dream" and reaching for "the unreachable star."

Cynics will tell you that history is made behind our backs. There is truth

in that, but it is equally true that we make history ourselves. Pessimists claim that life is what happens to you while you are making other plans. There is truth in that too, but it is also the case that our plans contribute to what happens in life. "Don't gamble," counseled Will Rogers. But you must gamble if you desire to live. You must risk if you wish to minister.

I do not encourage you to be reckless, but I do charge you to be venturesome. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks powerfully of Abraham and Sarah who "obeyed when they were called to go out to a place which they were to receive as an inheritance; and they went out, not knowing where they were to go" (11:8).

Paul the apostle, having fully preached the gospel "from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum," dreamed of preaching the good news in Spain (Rom. 15:18-24). God overruled Paul's missionary plans, but the point is that he was willing to risk because he was "sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). May your life and ministry be informed by that same certainty.

Next week the Seminary will welcome back the Class of 1943 at its alumni/ae event. A half-century ago that class sat where you sit today, and it went forth in a time of World War to serve even as you go forth to do the same. I wonder what the collective voice of that class would say to you if given the opportunity. No doubt they would tell you from their own life experience that you cannot buy low and sell high without risk.

My hunch is that they would also affirm to you that amid all of the uncertainties and ambiguities and absurdities of life in Christian ministry, there is the constancy and faithfulness of the God who never lets us off, never lets us down, and never lets us go. May that be the collective experiential wisdom of the Class of 1993 when it returns for its fifty-year reunion in the year 2043.

What You Need to Know

by PATRICK D. MILLER

Patrick D. Miller, the 1993 baccalaureate preacher, is the Charles T. Haley Professor of Old Testament Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and co-editor of Theology Today.

Text: Matthew 22:23-33

I AM speaking over the heads of the faculty this afternoon—at least, in one sense. What I mean is that this sermon is directed specifically to those of you who are about to graduate, our friends, former students, and future colleagues in the ministry. The rest of you are welcome to listen in to see if there is something appropriate to your own life and work.

The title I have given the sermon is somewhat audacious, as I am well aware. It is presumptuous of me at this last moment to claim to be able to tell you what you need to know as you go forth into the ministry of Christ. But I take the answer to the implicit question in the sermon title, “What do you need to know?” from our Lord. It is not my own. I am a tradent, passing on the Word, and suggesting its appropriateness for those who leave this school to enter into the service of that same Lord. And what I have to say will be brief, as Jesus’ own words were brief. This text is no ten-page list of competencies for the ministry.

Jesus’ response to the Sadducees who question him is an ad hoc word on which I am now generalizing. It is a controversy pericope that I am turning into a piece of instruction for disciples. It is a *particular* word to a *particular* question, and I am suggesting it is the *continuing* word for *all* questions. So one risks transforming what is a limited saying of Jesus into a much broader word, a rebuke into a word of instruction and comfort. But I think I can get away with that on two grounds.

1) There is some sense in which the scriptures regard no words of Jesus as casual. A kind of often-ridiculed reflection of that conviction is found in those red-letter Bible versions that highlight all of Jesus’ words in red type. I suppose that would be the case even if he only said *kai ho*, “and the,” one time. And President Gillespie would probably be able to preach a sermon on even that Jesus saying! So also the often-ridiculed project of a number of New Testament scholars getting together to decide and let the world know which of the sayings are really Jesus’ words suggests that these particular words have a broader significance.

2) But I can draw upon this text of conflict between Jesus and a Jewish party, the Sadducees, as a word to you about your ministry in this time and

place also because what Jesus accuses the Sadducees of needing to know and of not knowing, in their confrontation with him, are two things that dominate Jesus' own ministry from beginning to end. The scriptures and the power of God are always present and out front in Jesus' ministry, in what he says and does. At the critical beginning of his ministry, in Luke's account, it is the scriptures that Jesus opens to explain what he is about, why God has sent him. And what they point to is the power of God at work in this one in our midst, a power for healing and release, for seeing and for breaking the bonds that enchain us (Lk. 4:16-21).

That, of course, is what *you* need to know every bit as much as the Sadducees—two things, the scriptures and the power of God. Because they did not really know either one, they sought to destroy him. Your ignorance of those things cannot destroy the Lord you serve, only betray him.

I do not really know how one can ever measure success in the ministry, or whether we should even try. If so, such measurement generally has to be done by others rather than by ourselves. The issue that those engaged in ministry have to raise about themselves is that of faithfulness. I want to suggest to you that among those things without which faithful ministry is difficult or impossible, knowledge of the scriptures and knowledge of the power of God are at the top.

In urging the knowledge of the scriptures as essential to a faithful ministry, I risk reminding you of the obvious, but it cannot be said too loudly. Nor do I think that the people in whose midst you will carry out your ministry will disagree with this commendation of the knowledge of the scriptures as a first order of business. The study of the Bible is something that has consumed much of your energies during your years here. And part of why I am setting that before you once again is because the knowledge of the scriptures is not a hoop to be jumped through as a part of theological education. I assure you the Sadducees were at the top of their seminary classes. The knowledge of the scriptures is the lifeblood of your ministry. But it is only at a beginning. The learning of the scriptures is a task to which each of us is to give our continuing efforts so that the scriptures become a part of who we are and the source of our ministry in both word and deed. I trust that I will not be misunderstood as one member of a department of the Seminary engaging in special pleading in behalf of the primacy of his "field." Not at all; I don't know whether Jesus would have been caught dead on a theological faculty, but I doubt that it would have been in the Bible Department in any event. Indeed it is my judgment that in the work of the ministry you are fundamentally theologians and pastors, not biblical scholars. But the source

and ground of that theological and pastoral work is always the Word of God.

The knowledge of the scriptures belongs to the church's ministry for two purposes: *to draw from it in every endeavor and to be shaped by it in your whole being*. This means, at least, that one is to become so at home in the whole of scripture, to learn to walk around in it as familiar territory, that one draws instinctively from it and turns always to it in preaching and teaching, in the struggle with the difficult moral issues that will arise in the congregation or the social context in which you live and work, in the range of your pastoral care, whether it is in formal counsel to troubled persons, the ministry to the sick and dying, or that less-defined sustaining of the souls of your people in their daily endeavors to live the Christian life amidst perplexity, anxiety, guilt, fear, and doubt of self and God. In such situations, your people will want in some fashion, often ill defined if not unrealized, to hear, as we have put it more often in the past, a word from the Lord. The words that you have from the Lord are to be found where they have always been found, there in the scriptures.

When I was ordained and installed as a pastor of a congregation, my father said these words to me. I pass them on to you:

Open the Book with but one prayerful and passionate desire: to let it speak through you God's word to his people. The Bible is your book; see that nothing less is offered to your hearers. Bring only *beaten oil* to the Temple—no other offering is worthy of the one who called you or sufficient to human needs. Place prayer and study of the Word *early* in every day and let nothing interfere with this. The most worn rug in this church should be the one under your study desk.

That other thing you need to know, if I overhear Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees correctly, is simply and impressively *the power of God*. For the minister of Christ, to know the power of God as a reality that has shaped her past and the history of that community of which she or he is a part and also to expect with confidence that God's power is at work *now* in the midst of this congregation and *this* people and in and through one's own ministry is as fundamental as all of the knowledge and skill that those of us in theological education can teach.

The danger of such a word, of course, is that it can be misconstrued by pastor or congregation as permission for laziness and naiveté, for the pastoral and theological error of thinking that divine power is something easily at hand, like chips to be cashed in—a danger that is present all over the place,

if the TV evangelists are any indicator. The power of God is mysterious and wonderful. The Spirit blows where it will. And the work of God is not apart from *human* work in the service of God. But when all of that is said and done, the faithfulness of the ministry includes not only that disciplined hard work that is inescapable and properly required of us, but also a trust that God is truly at work in the life of your people and will empower both their work and your own.

We tend too easily not to expect very much, and so we pray too little and despair too quickly. Like Israel in the wilderness, we see all the great and tall and fortified cities before us and forget the power of God that has given victory and nurtured and provided. The transforming power of God to heal broken bodies and minds, to soften hard hearts, to teach the ways of justice and peace, is promised to us and can be counted upon. But the Deuteronomic story suggests that God's power needs to be seen and trusted and known, else we will not know how to operate when we cross over the boundary into that new time and space that God has given to us. The weakness to which Israel's story alerts us is not finally a matter of incompetence or lack of gifts or even laziness. It is a weakness of the spirit whose mind is not stayed on God and whose expectations for what the Lord can do in the midst of God's people are too timid. When in the church's liturgy you declare God's forgiveness, when you pray at beds of pain for God's strength and comfort, do so in the full knowledge that God's wonders never cease, that resurrection—life out of death—is not a concept. That is God's thing!

The rural priest in George Bernanos' famed novel *The Diary of a Country Priest* lacked many of the personal gifts that one would want in a pastor and was not well trained for the priesthood. He performed ineptly much of the time. But he knew, as he said with his last breath, that "Grace is everywhere." Take that conviction with you into your ministry. It is a reminder of whose power is ultimately at work. Believing it, you can, like Paul, do all things through Christ, who will give you strength.

"All Scripture Is Inspired . . ."?¹

by COLIN GUNTON

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THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER

THE DEVELOPMENT of the modern critical approach to scripture is at the same time a crisis for revelation. That is almost a truism in the light of the history of recent theology, but its very obviousness can cause us to exaggerate the differences between the present and the past. It should never be forgotten that three of the great exponents of allegorical exegesis of scripture, Philo, Origen, and Augustine, had problems with the historical form of the Bible's teaching that were surprisingly similar to those of the modern critics.² Yet the difference between the eras is shown in the fact that the form that the modern development took was, unlike the ancient discussion, in criticism of the possibility of biblical revelation rather than in defense of a form of it. Ancient rationalism was in defense of the inspiration of scripture, whereas its modern form is mostly in opposition.³ A large part of the sorry tale is that the modern opponents of the rationalizers chose the wrong field on which to contest the matter, following that side of Origen that encouraged the search for an inspired meaning in every text of the holy book. But at least we can say in favor of the development that it produced in Samuel Taylor Coleridge one who was able to raise certain questions that opened a route into an appropriately modern treatment of the problems.

Coleridge was acutely aware of the modern dilemma presented by critical study:

If between this Word and the written Letter I shall anywhere seem to myself to find a discrepance, I will not conclude that such there actually is; nor on the other hand will I fall under the condemnation of them that

¹ A slightly revised version of the fourth Warfield Lecture, delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary on March 24, 1993.

² Perhaps we should say unremarkably similar, for rationalists of all kinds find difficulty with the concrete, imaginative form of scripture.

³ It should be noted, however, that the defenders of some forms of a doctrine of the inspiration of scripture can themselves be rationalistic, as James Barr has pointed out; see "The Problem of Fundamentalism Today," in *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1980), pp. 65-90.

would *lie for God*, but seek as I may, be thankful for what I have—and wait.⁴

But he was also aware that there is in connection with revelation, and underlying the question about intellectual integrity, another important duality, between subjective appropriation and objective givenness. He realized that the question of the revelatory authority of the Bible can be answered only in the light of a careful relating of that which the Bible gives, and that in the reader which responds. That is, the problem takes the form of the perennial question of modern epistemology, the relation between subject and object. His formulation of the question is often quoted:

And need I say that I have met everywhere [in the Bible] more or less copious sources of truth, and power, and purifying impulses;—that I have found words for my inmost thoughts, songs for my joy, utterances for my hidden griefs . . . ? In short whatever *finds* me, bears witness for itself that it has proceeded from a Holy Spirit.⁵

"I have found," "whatever finds me"—that raises the question of the relation between subject and object. And the epistemological question leads to a dogmatic one concerning the relation that we conceive between revelation and inspiration—between that which scripture has to tell us, and the way in which it is enabled to do it. Biblical literalism of all kinds confuses the two, and the example Coleridge gives in *Table Talk* illustrates very well the distinction, which is so often ignored:

There may be dictation without inspiration, and inspiration without dictation; they have been and continue to be grievously confounded. Balaam and his ass were the passive organs of dictation; but no one, I suppose, will venture to call either of those worthies inspired. It is my profound conviction that St. John and St. Paul were divinely inspired; but I totally disbelieve the dictation of any one word, sentence, or argument throughout their writings. Observe, there was revelation. All religion is revealed; *revealed* religion is, in my judgement, a mere pleonasm.⁶

According to this distinction between inspiration and revelation, the way is

⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 26. The recommendation of waiting is, perhaps, another reminder of the essentially eschatological character of revelation.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Table Talk of S. T. Coleridge*, introduced by H. Morley (London: Routledge, 1884), p. 147.

open for a doctrine of the divine inspiration of scripture that can allow for the fully human character of its writers, and dispense with the need to wring equal meaning out of every text. We can, indeed, go further, and argue that much of the history of the doctrine of inspiration is in large measure an attempt to equate inspiration and revelation in such a way that the text in some way or other replaces or renders redundant the mediating work of the Spirit.⁷

Let us approach the problem of inspiration by mediation through a brief review of the point at issue between Karl Barth and his conservative critics. Barth is a modern theologian in that he holds to the modern dogma of the humanity of scripture. Where he differs from his critics is in his location or weighting of the inspirational process. He tends to put the weight not so much on the process by which the writers were inspired to write what they did, as on that by which their writings by inspiration, so to speak, *become* revelation in the here and now. The emphasis is not on revelation *then* but on the event of revelation *now*.⁸ The charge of the critics is that this encourages an excessively actualist view of the Bible, in effect conceding too much to the doctrine of its humanity, too little to the intrinsic inspiredness of the text. That will be at the heart of the question asked in this lecture: In what sense is scripture the mediator of revelation because of the unique inspiration of its writers? What may such inspiration be taken to mean?

To be sure, Barth's view of the matter is in many respects like that of the mainstream Christian tradition, including that of Roman Catholicism, in holding clearly to the view that scripture is not revelation, but in some sense mediator of it. What is at issue is the nature of that mediation. Virtually all Christian theologies posit a space between the words of scripture and the articulation of Christian teaching. The most conservative of evangelicals, for example, agree that scripture has to be interpreted. One cannot, that is, read doctrine logically off the pages. Virtually nobody holds that we are given the word of God in an entirely unmediated sense, and therein may lie a major difference, at least of theory, between Christianity and Islam. It is after that that the differences begin to appear, so that this is not merely a matter between Barth and those more conservative than he, but of the very nature of Christianity. What is at stake is the nature of scripture's mediation of revelation.

⁷ Here I am very close to the classic Reformed distinction between the external word of scripture and the *verbum internum* of the Spirit. The modern version of the syndrome is the tendency to turn the text, the narrative, etc., into a kind of divine agent in its own right.

⁸ Here is one of the places where Barth continues to be close to Bultmann.

THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICITY

Whether we like it or not, whether or not we proclaim the future orientation of Christianity and the eschatological character of revelation until we are blue in the face, we cannot escape a question upon which even eschatology depends: that of the historicity and *therefore* timelessness, in the sense of static lodgment in time, of the basis of revelation—in a man once born and crucified, in the nation from which he came, and in the book that claims on almost every page, implicitly if not explicitly, to be the vehicle of revelation. Whatever we make of the fashionable claims about textuality, and in my case that is not much, at least in this respect we are tied to the text. It is there, in our past and present like—as someone once said of the theology of Barth—a mountain in our back garden.

Suppose, then, that we take revelation to mean in general the making known of that which otherwise remains hidden or unknown. Of what revelation might we consider scripture to be the vehicle? There have been in recent times a number of candidates for that description, and we might allude to the two forms of modern quest noted by Hans Frei: for facts ascertained by historical enquiry of the same kind as that sought by secular methods of historiography, and for timeless didactic ideas indicated by the narratives.⁹ Alternatively, we might locate revelation in some form of existential immediacy, as appears to be the case with Bultmann and indeed sometimes with Barth. The problems with all these approaches have been related often enough, and it can be said that in different ways they all evince a deficient pneumatology, an inadequate way of characterizing revelation as mediated by God the Holy Spirit. The work of the Spirit is in some way either replaced by human intellectual activity or centred in subjective human response, on the one hand, or, on the other, made to appear objective in a rather authoritarian manner, for example in the legal judgment of some ecclesiastical body.

Suppose, second, that we affirm the generally revelatory character of scripture, and repeat the question: What is here made known that is not knowable without the texts? We can approach an answer by taking as a test case the first chapter of the book of Genesis. The advantage of this is that it enables us to avoid crude theories of revelation, and in particular those in which the text is made to mediate truth of a theologically inappropriate kind. I shall come to that question later, but it is easy to show the kinds of

⁹ Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 103.

things that are meant. It is wrong to seek from Genesis either the kinds of philosophical structuring of reality sought by allegorists from Philo onwards or the kinds of scientific facts that are sometimes alleged by certain forms of biblicism. That is to say, we must eschew any attempt to read Genesis either in the light of a philosophy or as a kind of primitive, or even timelessly valid, science. If we accept also the inadequacy of a crude mythological account that holds that we can learn from Genesis only about the structures of rationality of the primitive mind—that is, if we approach the text expecting to learn something that we should not otherwise find—then it is possible to approach an answer.

The Genesis account of creation is unique. It is not unique in every sense, for there are clear parallels between it and the creation myths of other cultures. But it is unique in presenting a pattern of divine action that is different in kind from anything else. Some points about the difference between Genesis 1 and other texts are to be found in much recent commentary. Negatively, what Genesis 1 tells us, as is almost certainly not told by any other doctrine or myth of creation, certainly not by anything deriving from the philosophy of Greece, is that the world does not come from the body of god or gods, but is the product of free divine activity. Even if it is anachronistic to see in it an account of creation out of nothing, there is without doubt an unparalleled expression of the freedom of God over against all that is created. In addition, a recent study of hermeneutics by Francis Watson has shown that there is also to be found in this chapter a pattern of mediation that makes it interestingly and uniquely what it is, so that through it the world can be understood to be in various forms of relation to its maker.

Watson discerns a threefold pattern of mediation in the text. The first is the oft-remarked speech-act model. However, he believes that on its own this creates problems, and in opposition to certain versions of the doctrine that we create our world through speech, he argues that “the biblical narrative does *not* in fact offer a simple account of creation through speech” and “in fact the speech-act model occurs unambiguously on only three occasions in this chapter.” Therefore it requires supplementation. The second model for divine action is what he calls the “fabrication model,” where the objects of creation do not immediately spring into being but have to be constructed. It is not absolutely distinct from the first model, and is often, both here and in the Psalms, used in conjunction with it, and with a third, which he calls the mediation model. “God creates immediately by command and by fabrication, but also and simultaneously he creates mediately in employing one of his creatures as the womb out of which the others proceed” (“Let the earth

bring forth . . ."). "The creation narrative thus makes use of three interconnected but distinct models in order to represent the act of divine creation. Each has a different role, but the full meaning of each emerges only in combination with the others." It is thus, and Watson draws out the point, incipiently trinitarian:

This God is, first, transcendent, but the function of this theme is still to express something of the *relationship* between creator and creation, and not to postulate a deity who is so wholly other as to be incapable of creating. Second, this God is wholly involved in his creative activity, and his involvement takes the intimately bodily form of labour. . . . Third, in the most intimate relation of all, this God indwells her creation, not in the form of a passive, static presence but in an active dynamic, self-transcending movement towards the emergence and reproduction of life and breath.¹⁰

Building on Watson's work I want to suggest further that in the light of the tradition of interpretation the very originality and, in certain respects, offensive character of this text have blinded exegetes to what now can be seen to be its leading message. In particular, the long tradition of allegorical and Platonizing exegesis has made it very hard to come to terms with the text's celebration of the goodness of the material world, while an equally long tradition, also influenced by Platonizing suspicions of materiality, found it difficult to come to terms with the claim that male and female are alike, together and as such, created in the image of God. In this respect, too, the text teaches us things that simply could not be learned elsewhere, as Calvin recognized when he taught that we cannot see the world as it truly is apart from the spectacles given us by the Bible. Or, to use another example, it seems likely that had Michael Faraday not been what we would call a biblicist Christian, he would have been unlikely to be as critical of Newtonian mechanism as he was. Among his reasons for the rejection of Newtonian atomism and the void were considerations drawn from scripture.¹¹ We might say, then, that the text of Genesis, interpreted in the light of other aspects of the Bible, to be sure, has revelatory authority in that it enables us to understand and articulate something of the truth of God's foundational, mediatory, and redemptive relations with that which he has made.

¹⁰ All the quotations are taken from the typescript of a forthcoming study of hermeneutics by Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Towards a Theological Hermeneutic for Biblical Studies* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark).

¹¹ Geoffrey Cantor, *Michael Faraday: Sandemanian and Scientist: A Study of Science and Religion in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 190-193. Faraday was not unique in rejecting the mechanist tradition, but may have been unique in the biblical reasons he gave for doing so.

What we gain from Genesis is thus the knowledge of a unique form of scriptural mediation.¹² We could proceed on this basis to argue that the text is therefore inspired—is the work of the Spirit—because it reveals things that are to be found nowhere else. We could support this claim in a number of ways. We could compare the Genesis text with other apparently similar documents and show that it expresses a clear rejection of the divinity of the creation, and has contributed to the rise of modern science. We could insist that, along with other related parts of scripture, it provided a necessary condition for other forms of knowledge and activity to be developed. It has been a matrix for human culture as well as religion. In parallel with this we could argue that such a view is consonant with a pneumatology that understands the Spirit to use in the process the abilities and cultural forms of the writers. Biblical revelation is thus to be understood as the making known of truths about the ways of God towards and with the created order that cannot be obtained elsewhere.

How far would that take us? A long way, but not, it would seem, far enough. On the face of things, what we obtain in this way would simply be a form of theological information: facts about God and the world. Is that what we mean by revelation? Revelation certainly includes the imparting of information, but if we remain there, we are stuck with a rather intellectualist view and the concomitant suggestion, rightly rejected by Schleiermacher, that Christian belief is the appropriation of factual information. Let me approach the same question in a different way. One of the proposals sometimes heard for the solution to the problem of biblical inspiration is that we consider the Bible as a kind of classic: a work that retains its hold as an indispensable work of literature, providing clues to our being in the world that are unavailable elsewhere. On such an account, however, we reach a similar difficulty, for there are many classics, and they give us all kinds of information—and, of course, more than that, wisdom—that cannot be found elsewhere. But they are not the Bible. We must, then, seek further for an answer to the question of the Bible's unique inspiration and mediation of revelation, an answer that does not take away what we have discovered, but takes it further.

¹² If Genesis is revelatory, it becomes impossible to limit revelation to revelation through history. That is a way of speaking of Exodus 3 and Jesus, for example, but is too restrictive to cover other putative instances. And even if the hypothesis is correct that Hebrew creation theology results from reflection on history, and particularly the exodus, the fact remains that its content cannot be called historical. Nor will the idea of revelation as God's self-revelation cover this kind of case, and therefore it too must fall as a comprehensive account. How does all this relate to the question of general revelation? Whatever else it is, Genesis 1 does not come under this either, because it *revises* our view of God's relation to nature.

We can approach this question by asking what is the difference between general and special revelation. While scripture contains witness to general revelation, that is not primarily what it is concerned with. We may see this if we realize that to treat Genesis 1 in isolation is to fail to see it in its own context, which is to serve also as a framework for the great story of salvation that begins with the call of Abraham. However, even that could be misleading. The call of Abraham and the subsequent story of Israel and Israel's greatest son could also be viewed as a kind of information. The unique character and authority of scripture as *revelation* is that it claims to be more than informationally unique, i.e., the bearer of saving knowledge, a vehicle of the word that "is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

In this context we are inevitably thrown into the realm of christology and soteriology. The distinctive mark of the revelatory character of the Bible is its relation to salvation in Christ, the mediator of salvation. The revelatory uniqueness of the Bible derives from its mediation of the life of this person, and particularly his cross and resurrection, so that its distinctive problematic derives from the fact that these are past events, apparently marooned in an era to which we do not belong. But the limits of such an analysis—and of all theologies based on the supposed "historical Jesus"—are to be seen in questions about the identity of the one who died on the cross. "Who *is* Jesus Christ?" is a question couched not in the past but the present tense. He is, according to the church's faith, the one who came, is ascended at the right hand of the Father, and will come again at the end of the ages. If the present Jesus is the ascended Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for his people, how is he mediated—as at once and in different respects absent and present—to us? Put otherwise, if the ascended Christ is the mediator of salvation now, how is this salvation mediated? In a number of ways, we might say, but prominent among them is scripture. But how? Does scripture *identify* only? Clearly, revelation is of the character and acts of the one who is identified, but how is a knowledge of them related to salvation? We can only begin to answer such a question in the rest of this lecture, but a beginning can nonetheless be made.

REVELATION AND THE PROBLEM OF THE PAST

The particular quality of the Bible's mediation of revelation is derived from its mediation of salvation. Its uniqueness derives from the uniqueness of the Christ who is mediated and of that which is mediated by Christ. But

this only returns us to the question with which we began about the relation between inspiration and revelation. In what sense is the Bible inspired in such a way that it becomes the unique vehicle of revelation? Let me try to develop a view by alluding to the picture that we usually have of the process of inspiration: of the writer sitting at a desk, with a shadowy figure over his shoulder, either actually dictating words or more vaguely providing guidance. Is this how the Spirit works? Well, why not, sometimes? Do not the artist and scientist sometimes feel that they have been given insight from beyond, like that which apparently granted Anselm his wish to find one argument with which to put beyond all doubt the existence of God?¹³

But while this may sometimes help us to understand how all truth and beauty is in some way the fruit of inspiration, it is, in our context, too individualist a picture. The work of the Spirit in this case must be understood in terms of the particular patterns of relations with which we are concerned when we speak of the inspiration of scripture. We can build a more adequate picture of what happens if we bear in mind two features of the characteristic work of God the Holy Spirit. In the first place, the Spirit is the one whose gift is communion, community, both with God and with others. The Spirit is thus, among other things, the Spirit of the church. We are now often reminded that the books of the Bible are as much the work of the early Christian community as they are of individual writers. Indeed, the authors are sometimes called redactors, those who pieced together parts of the tradition into literary wholes in the light of the needs of the communities of which they were a part. Similarly, speculative biblical scholars reproduce what they hold to be the shape of the communities in and for which the books were produced. This might be taken to be the death knell of a theory of inspiration. It is not the Spirit, but the community that creates what we call scripture. But why should it be so problematic? If the Paraclete is the one who guides the community into all truth, as the Fourth Gospel promises that he is, why should not the Bible's inspiration derive from precisely this fact, that it is the book of a community, or rather of the people of God who are variously Israel and the church?

That, in itself, is not enough to establish the kind of uniqueness that I am seeking. The Jewish and Christian communities have other books that serve their lives, sometimes even the works of theologians. What is the distinction between these books, in their own way inspired, and the unique inspiration of scripture, that makes the concepts of inspiration and revelation so difficult

¹³ Anselm of Canterbury, Preface to *Proslogion*.

to disentangle? Before approaching the heart of the matter, I must introduce the second of my two marks of the doctrine of the Spirit. It is that we are not here concerned with any Spirit, but with the one who through Christ brings us to God the Father. If we are to rely on the testimony of the New Testament, and particularly that of the Fourth Gospel, it is noteworthy that their emphasis is not on Jesus Christ as revealing himself, as Barth sometimes tends to suggest. It is rather on Jesus as the one who makes known, indeed mediates, God the Father. Within the complex interrelations of the persons of the Trinity, the function of the Spirit is to guide to Jesus as the one who reveals the Father. The Spirit is thus the one who points away from himself to Jesus, whose will is to do the work of the one who sends him.

The Bible's particular inspiration will therefore be found somewhere here, which means that we cannot avoid some discussion of the concept of apostolicity, of the unique position of those whose lives were bound up with him who came out of Israel and died on a cross. They, and that does not mean only the twelve who are called apostles, but the community gathered around them in the first days of the church, are those upon whom the historical Jesus, the Jesus of past history, made his particular impact as the revelation of God. Just as it is a logical truth that a proposition once true is always true, so it seems to me a fact of our historicity that what has happened has happened, and is thus unchangeable: brute reality, although not brute reality so much as personal and redemptive givenness—in Alec Whitehouse's fine expression, the authority of grace.¹⁴

Scripture is accordingly inspired because God the Spirit enabled members of a community in a particular time to articulate what it was about that particular configuration of events that was uniquely significant for the salvation of the world. I think it is too external a way of putting it, as Barth tends to, to speak here of scripture as witness, evocative though his use of Grünewald's portrait is, with the long bony finger of John the Baptist pointing away from himself to the crucified Christ. The weakness of the metaphor of the witness is that sometimes witnesses speak of what they see, autonomously and in their own strength.¹⁵ According to that picture, the work of the Spirit is to turn their human words into the words of God. The point of my way of putting it is twofold. It is first to express a little more

¹⁴ W. A. Whitehouse, *The Authority of Grace: Essays in Response to Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), p. 142.

¹⁵ "This interpretation of theirs, this exposition of Christ, was a providential, integral, and, we may say, polar part of the action of the total fact itself, and not a searchlight thrown on it from without." "The Apostles were not panes of bad glass, but crystal cups the master filled." P. T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority* (London: Independent Press, 1952), pp. 131, 134.

adequately the fact of the work of the Spirit in ordering the community and its writings around the man Jesus, and thus of a process of formation both of the community and of its documents, in which the words are, as human, already and as a result of that process in an important sense the words of God.¹⁶ There is thus, to use an expression I owe to Alan Torrance, an intrinsic relation between revelation and the words used to enable it to come to expression.

The second point is to say something of the advantage of the contemporary. Here we reach some most interesting questions. Those who recognize an allusion to Kierkegaard will remember his claim that in view of the essential offense of the gospel about Jesus, the contemporary of the events is in no better a position than we are as regards capacity for belief.¹⁷ The contemporary of Jesus requires that revelation which overcomes disbelief as much as do we ("Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" [Mt. 16:17]). But there is also a sense in which the contemporary has, if not an advantage, at least a different function: apostolicity. There is a particular function to be performed by those who are apostles because of their unique relation to that which, in the words of the First Letter of John, "we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life." Their unique and unrepeatable function is to "proclaim also to you," but in such a way that revelation and more than revelation is mediated: "that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn. 1:1-3). The function of the contemporary, of the apostle, is to act as mediator of salvation to others. According to John, that was the aim of his writing his Gospel: "these [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31). May we not say that to enable them to write what they have written and to enable their words to be the indispensable mediators of revelation is the work of the Spirit in inspiration?¹⁸

An analogous argument can be developed for the inspiration of the Old Testament, in the light of the concept not so much of apostolicity as of

¹⁶ "And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13). The reference to this text was made by Thomas W. Gillespie, the President of Princeton Seminary, in the discussion after the lecture.

¹⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. D. F. Swenson and H. V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), chap. 4.

¹⁸ In what sense is the Spirit the perfecter of the text, of the work of its writers? It is not only because they record revelation, but because their words are in some way revelation. "The Spirit is *in* the apostolic word, it is not simply *with* it and *in* us." Forsyth, *ibid.*, p. 141.

prophecy, in the widest sense of those who mediate the word of God to the present. Their revelatory function also derives from their place in a community, in this case the historic community called by God to be a light to the nations and the people out of whom Jesus of Nazareth came. The question of revelation is in this case more complex, for chiefly two reasons. The first is that, although we may not understand Jesus' identity nor his saving reality without the witness of the prophets, it is also true that Jesus' ministry represented a choice of one among the number of possibilities offered by the Old Testament for the shape of being the holy people of God. That is why, although the New Testament writers see that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament as a whole,¹⁹ they are also free to draw upon some strands of its tradition at the expense of others (in particular, of course, those that express the vicarious suffering rather than military glory of the messiah, and the more universalistic strands of Israel's mission). The second difference in the Old Testament's revelatory character is that in Jesus God is personally present in a way only anticipated in Israel. That is why we need not be embarrassed about the less acceptable sides of the record, for it is only to be expected that the trumpet will at times give a more uncertain sound. Choices have to be made, but they are not choices for which there are no criteria, and that does not exclude a belief that here too the Spirit works through the structures of community and the human gifts of the writers, making the Old Testament in its particular and concrete way the mediator of revelation.

CONCLUSION

It is not in itself problematic that our faith is tied to a man who lived long ago and is mediated by the words of those who were uniquely bound up in historical and communal tradition and in personal fellowship with him. Yet to understand what this does and does not imply, we must draw some distinctions. The fact that revelation or its records are in one sense *fixed* does not entail, first, that there can be no new divine action. It is rather to limit the scope of the doctrine of revelation against what is sometimes taken to be the implication of the theology of Barth, who appears by his conflating revelation with other forms of divine action to have given to many the impression that, because of the way in which revelation is in one respect tied to the past, there is no further divine action, only the working out of what God has done already. Biblical revelation (given, fixed, static, and textual as it is), as a matter of fact may be the ground for believing that there are

¹⁹ See Luke 24:25-27.

further divine acts to come ("Behold, I do a new thing"), or that the ascended Christ is a living and active advocate with the Father, or that the Spirit works to perfect the creation.

Nor does it entail, second, that there is no new understanding of revelation. Again, the reverse is the case. The form of revelation is such as to encourage enquiry, in the belief that we shall learn greater things, and that the servant of the kingdom is as a scribe bringing forth things both new and old. Must we nevertheless say that, short of the end—the final revelation—in Christian theology there is no new revelation, only new appropriation of, understanding of, revelation? According to Calvin, the Spirit enables us through the medium or mediation of scripture to see that the world is God's world. Again, this is the mediation of a truth that is unchanging, though our apprehension of its content may change.²⁰ That is where the discipline of theology must necessarily differ from other disciplines, which are not tied in the same way to past history. If God is the one who creates and redeems through Christ and the Spirit, and is made known as such by the incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus, then that is the one he always is. Any new action, therefore, can be expected within the framework of this eternal revelation (or revelation of the eternal gospel). This does not imply anything about the possibility that theology may often be, and may often have been, mistaken in its interpretation of revelation: for example, in its understanding of the Trinity or of the nature of women. What it does imply is quite the reverse, the possibility of progress in theology that is grounded in revelation, and in particular the promise that the Spirit will lead the church "into all truth." (Here we shall not forget that by that phrase the Fourth Gospel emphatically does not mean, into all information, but to Jesus who is the truth of God incarnate.) Therefore dogma and theology are revisable, scripture is in certain respects open to question, but revelation, mediated through scripture, is not.

The third thing that biblical revelation's restriction to the past does not imply is that, because it is, in the sense we have examined, tied to past history, Jesus also is. According to the past witness of scripture, Jesus is not a person marooned in the past but one who lives for ever to make intercession for us and will return at the end of the age as judge. Past revelation reveals a figure who is past, present, and to come: yesterday, today, and forever. The

²⁰ An interesting example here is in the function that the metaphor of the world as machine performed in both developing and obstructing a notion of the world as creation. On the one hand, it enabled both science and theology to break free from their Aristotelian captivity; but, on the other, it in turn became the source of a new bondage.

form of revelation is not identical to the form of that which it reveals, any more than the form of a scientific theory is identical with the form of the world it makes known, though in both cases there is an intrinsic relation between the two. And that leads directly into another question, which will have to be treated elsewhere but can be pointed to here. The church today is neither historically contemporary with the apostolic community, nor yet at the end of the age in which it will know as it is known. We are tied to the past in recollection, and to the future in hope. And yet there is also a sense in which we are one with the apostolic community because we are joined to them by a great chain of personal tradition. Revelation may be, in one sense, tied to the past. But in another it is not, for it is mediated from one generation to another by dynamic and personal process. The construal of that will, of course, have some bearing on the way in which the argument of this lecture is understood. But it is hoped that at least the chief outlines of one possible understanding of the relation of revelation and inspiration have been drawn in these few pages.

Pastoral Conversation as Embodied Language

by DONALD CAPPS

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GAYLORD NOYCE's book, *The Art of Pastoral Conversation*, is concerned with improving our pastoral conversations, "the conversations we have as we try to serve our fellow men and women in caring ways."¹ He begins by stressing the significance of conversation, noting that it is "a basic vehicle in human relationships, and the importance of relationships can hardly be overemphasized. Without them human life is impossible. The human self emerges only out of relationship! In no other way can we become persons."²

Noyce identifies the four types of conversation in which pastors may, and often, become involved. First is the *turning-point* conversation, where a person is at a junction, trying to make a decision, and somehow a talk helps to clarify the mind and will. Second is a *shared self-disclosure*, where two persons move to a new level of mutual understanding because one or the other reveals more than had been uncovered before. Third is a *growing edge exchange*, where the interests of one person and the competence of another are in such resonance that both learn from the conversation. Fourth is a *rehearsal*, or conversations that enable the participants to share and celebrate and remember certain events. Pastors can and do participate in, and facilitate, each and every one of these types of conversations.³

In a chapter titled "The Nondirective Handicap," however, Noyce is concerned that, while the nondirective (or "Rogerian") approach to pastoral care and counseling reveals the inadequacies of pastoral conversation that merely offers advice or religious platitudes, there is the danger that, when this approach is used, the faith that sustains our own ministry will not be communicated to the person in need: "We know our listening is very important. Yet we continue to wish that those with whom we talk in caring exchanges might know more deeply the robust faith of which they are capable."⁴ He contends that pastors need to feel free to go beyond the legiti-

¹ Gaylord Noyce, *The Art of Pastoral Conversation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

mately circumscribed domain of secular counseling and to do more than listen: "At the appropriate time we do share something of our response to the other's story. We tell a story too, in our manner or in the words that come from faith as the two of us together face the dilemmas that oppress the one seeking help."⁵ Thus, our speaking does not take the place of listening, but is based on our listening, and is a direct outgrowth of it.

Noyce's phrase, "the art of pastoral conversation," is especially appropriate, because it points to the fact that pastoral conversation is not a science, having systematic methods and principles, but an art, or the ability to make certain desirable things happen that would not happen merely by chance. As poetry is also an art, it is well worth our asking whether poetry may be of assistance to us, especially in helping us to overcome "the nondirective handicap" with which so many of us have operated for so much of our professional lives. If poetry can be of help in this regard, it is unlikely to be by providing the content or material that would be used in the pastor's sharing of the story of faith, for this material would come from the pastor's more direct knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith. But perhaps poetry could be valuable in deepening our understanding of conversation itself, of what true conversation involves and exacts of its participants. Perhaps poetry might also shed light on what listening is all about, because it may be that we have settled for an impoverished understanding of what listening is by allowing it to be defined in the language and terms of "nondirective" counseling.

On the other hand, I do not believe the problem is with Carl Rogers' own approach but with the way it has been trivialized and watered down in its application to pastoral care. The verbatim, a commonly used pedagogical device in pastoral care courses in seminary and in Clinical Pastoral Education, has contributed to such trivialization, as it has given the impression that "nondirective" care and counseling is largely a matter of paraphrasing the parishioner's or client's words, as though one is engaged in a kind of word-play. Of course, this is not what those who have used the verbatim have intended to communicate or teach, but, all too often, this has been the outcome. It is little wonder, then, that pastoral theologians like Noyce would refer to the nondirective approach developed by Rogers as a "handicap," and that we are now witnessing a strong backlash against the "Rogerian" approach to pastoral care and counseling.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

What poetry may enable us to do is to recover those features of Rogers' client-centered approach that were not adequately carried over into pastoral care and counseling when his model was introduced to seminarians and pastors. In this essay, I will use the poetry of Denise Levertov to show how the nondirective or client-centered approach need not be a handicap to pastors in their pastoral conversations, but a powerful resource. To make this case, I need first to introduce a few selections from Rogers' writings that reveal his own understanding of what transpires between the counselor and the client when the counselor is working out of a nondirective or client-centered orientation.

TWO KEY FEATURES OF CLIENT-CENTERED COUNSELING

First, there is Rogers' insistence on the importance of empathy or empathic understanding in the counselor's attitude toward and response to the client. This is also described by Rogers as placing oneself within the internal frame of reference of the client. Here is one of his many efforts to explain what such empathy is and entails:

The fourth condition for therapy is that the therapist is experiencing an accurate, empathic understanding of the client's world as seen from the inside. To sense the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the "as if" quality—this is empathy, and this seems essential to therapy. To sense the client's anger, fear, or confusion as if it were your own, yet without your own anger, fear, or confusion getting bound up in it, is the condition we are endeavoring to describe. When the client's world is this clear to the therapist, and he moves about in it freely, then he can both communicate his understanding of what is clearly known to the client and can also voice meanings in the client's experience of which the client is scarcely aware.⁶

Rogers calls this process of "seeing the client's world from inside" an *empathic* as opposed to an *emotional* identification because "the counselor is perceiving the hates and hopes and fears of the client through immersion in an empathic process, but without himself, as counselor, experiencing those hates and hopes and fears."⁷

The words, phrases, and sentences spoken by the counselor are expressive of this empathic immersion in the other's private world. As a visitor within

⁶ Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 284.

⁷ Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 29.

this private inner world, the counselor says to the other what this private world feels like to him or her. The counselor avoids evaluative comments—something we rarely avoid in ordinary conversation—and instead limits himself or herself to words, or phrases, or sentences, that convey how this inner world feels. Frequently, the counselor will, without conscious design or intention, articulate an aspect or feature of this inner world which, thus far, the other has not given expression to, and is perhaps not even yet aware of. As one of Rogers' clients confided to him:

I'm scarcely conscious of you any more; or perhaps it would be better to say I'm not *self*-conscious of you. I'm not scared of your opinion of me (or at least, the tiny remnants just amuse me) though in a sense I'm much more aware of the fact that you must have one, and I'd be quite genuinely interested in hearing it. And quite undisturbed by it, I think. I'm always interested in what you say, now, and perfectly willing to postpone something I was just going to say in order to listen—and *really* listen—to you. You said a lot of things this time that penetrated so far behind what I said that I had some difficulty in seeing that it was what I really meant. And yet you were right, and in spite of your outstripping me so far, I was interested and stimulated, rather than frightened into retreat. Oh golly, I was frightened once, wasn't I? Right near the beginning, when I said something about being rather better off than most people and you rephrased it so that I looked downright conceited. You scored a bull's eye with that one, as I subsequently realized very clearly indeed, but at the time I ran rapidly in the opposite direction. At one point, you said something about relationships that I couldn't see at all. Yet I had the feeling that it was somehow right, so I just agreed without understanding and went on. . . . A lot of your responses got home with a small shock—particularly the recurrent theme of "labels" and "conformity," and a lot of that you dug out of quite unpromising looking material. But those shocks were pleasant—it was a relief to have the pretense stripped away. I want to get rid of it, but I can't quite manage it myself, so you are just carrying out my own, real wish.⁸

As Rogers points out, the counselor's empathic understanding, reflected in accepting, non-evaluative verbal responses, enables the client to experience greater freedom to recognize and express aspects of his or her inner world that were previously unrecognized or denied. In this way, the client is able to

⁸ Ibid., pp. 110-111.

own more and more of this inner world, as less and less of it is walled off and pushed out of conscious awareness.

Second, Rogers makes a considerable point of the fact that in client-centered therapy, it is not just the voice, but the total organism that expresses itself. This being the case, the counselor is as likely to respond to the client's body language as to the client's verbal language. In describing the various stages of the therapeutic process, he notes that there is a point in the process when the client experiences a "physiological loosening" that accompanies the freeing of previously inhibited feelings:

Moistness in the eyes, tears, sighs, muscular relaxation, are frequently evident. Often there are other physiological concomitants. I would hypothesize that in these moments, had we the measure for it, we would discover improved circulation, improved conductivity of nervous impulses.⁹

He then illustrates this physiological component of the therapeutic process with the following example: The client, a young man, has expressed the wish that his parents would die or disappear. "It's kind of like wanting to wish them away, and wishing they had never been. . . . And I'm so ashamed of myself because then they call me, and off I go—swish! They're somehow still so strong. I don't know. There's some umbilical—I can almost feel it inside me—swish." Here he gestures, plucking himself away by grasping at his navel. When the therapist responds by noting that the client's parents have a hold on his umbilical cord, the client says, "It's funny how real it feels. . . . It's like a burning sensation, kind of, and when they say something that makes me anxious I can feel it right here. . . . It's so hard to define the feeling that I feel there." Rogers observes: "Here he is living subjectively in the feeling of dependence on his parents. Yet it would be most inaccurate to say that he is perceiving it. He is *in* it, experiencing it as a strain on his umbilical cord."¹⁰

In another case, a young man has been having difficulty getting close to a certain unknown feeling. As he begins to explore it, he senses that it has something to do with the fact that he has been "living so much of my life, and seeing so much of my life in terms of being scared of something." He goes on to tell about how his professional activities are just to give him a little safety and "a little world where I'll be secure, you know." Then his tone

⁹ Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, pp. 147-148.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

changes: "Won't you *let* me have this? I kind of *need* it. I can be so lonely and scared without it." The therapist responds: " 'Let me hang on to it because I'd be terribly scared if I didn't!' . . . It's a kind of pleading thing too, isn't it?" The client agrees: "I get a sense of—it's this kind of pleading little boy. It's this gesture of begging." At this point, he puts his hands up as if in prayer, and the therapist comments on this gesture: "You put your hands in kind of a supplication." The client responds: "Yeah, that's right. '*Won't* you do this for me?' kind of. Oh, that's terrible! Who, Me? Beg? . . . That's an emotion I've never felt clearly at all—something I've never been . . . (Pause) . . . I've got such a confusing feeling. One is, it's such a wondrous feeling to have these new things come out of me. It amazes me so much each time, and there's that same feeling, being scared that I've so much of this. (Tears) . . . I just don't know myself. Here's suddenly something I never realized, hadn't any inkling of—that it was some *thing* or *way* I wanted to be."¹¹

Rogers comments on the fact that the young man's feeling of pleadingness is who he is at this moment: "Here he is, for a moment, experiencing himself as nothing but a pleading little boy, supplicating, begging, dependent. At that moment he is nothing but his pleadingness, all the way through."¹² Rogers then goes on to note that this is usually how it is with deeply felt emotions: "It is not only dependency that is experienced in this all-out kind of fashion. It may be hurt, or sorrow, or jealousy, or destructive anger, or deep desire, or confidence and pride, or sensitive tenderness, or outgoing love. It may be any of the emotions of which man is capable." Then he adds this startling conclusion: "What I have gradually learned from experiences such as this, is that the individual in such a moment, is coming to *be* what he *is*. *When a person has, throughout therapy, experienced in this fashion all the emotions which organismically arise in him, and has experienced them in this knowing and open manner, then he has experienced himself*, in all the richness that exists within himself. He has become what he is."¹³ The client's experiencing *is* the client's true self.

Unfortunately, and, I believe, quite unintentionally, the verbatim form which is widely used in the training of seminarians and beginning pastors leads to a view of pastoral conversation as disembodied speech. Little if any attention is paid to the "total organismic context"¹⁴ in which words are spoken and have their essential meaning. What results is a form of Gnoti-

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 148-149.

¹² Ibid., p. 113.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 189.

cism in which words are separated from bodies and become like disembodied spirits, floating in air, just out of reach.

I believe that we can recover the spirit of the nondirective or client-centered approach for pastoral conversation by attending to how poets exhibit empathic understanding in their work and locate language in the body, or the total organismic experience. In making this plea—hands in supplication—for this recovery of client-centered emphases, I am not advocating that pastoral counseling per se be client-centered. As I have argued in other writings, I favor a more directive approach to pastoral counseling, especially in the parish setting, owing largely to the time limitations under which parish ministers must work.¹⁵ But, perhaps paradoxically, I think it is altogether possible for pastors to assume the client-centered approach when engaged in the less structured “pastoral conversations” which Noyce has in mind—that is, when pastors are involved in one or another of the four types of conversation which he identifies for us. It is precisely in these more informal, unstructured conversations that the pastor may enter into the inner world of the other with empathic understanding, and may be especially aware of the total organismic experiencing of the other. This is possible because, as Rogers points out, the client-centered approach was originally called “nondirective” because the counselor did not have a predetermined goal in mind nor a predetermined time frame within which this goal was to be reached. Thus, the informal pastoral conversation is the ideal context for the client-centered approach, as it allows for the possibility that any one of Noyce’s four types of conversations may emerge in the natural course of conversation. If there is no predetermined goal, and no predetermined time frame for achieving this goal, neither has the type of conversation been decided upon in advance—at least, not by the pastor, who comes, literally, with open arms, open mind, and open heart.

EMPATHIC UNDERSTANDING

I would like to draw upon some poems of Denise Levertov that bear on our preceding discussion. Levertov, born in Ilford, Essex, England, in 1923,

¹⁵ See Donald Capps, *Pastoral Care: A Thematic Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), chap. 3; idem, *Pastoral Counseling and Preaching* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), chap. 2; idem, *Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), chap. 1. I am not suggesting, however, that key features of the client-centered approach, such as empathic understanding, are inappropriate for problem-solving pastoral counseling. My point is simply that, in the parish context, it is necessary for counseling to be more specific from the outset as to anticipated goals and the time frame within which such goals will be accomplished.

was the daughter of a Russian Jew who converted to Christianity, became an Anglican priest, and dedicated his life to the unification of Christianity and Judaism. Her mother was Welsh, a descendent of tradespeople with a gift for preaching. She moved to the United States in 1948 shortly after her first book of poetry was published, and became a naturalized citizen in 1955. She has published over forty books of poetry, the most recent entitled *Evening Train* (1992). She has taught poetry at various American universities on a visiting basis and held full professorships at Tufts and Stanford University. She was active in the anti-war movement in the 1960s, and has written poems supportive of the liberation movements in South and Central America, and against the Persian Gulf War. Her sense of the moral necessity of opposing a war she believed unjust is related to her personal history, as her parents were prisoners of war during World War I and their house was a center for the reception and relocation of Jewish refugees during World War II.

To me, one of the most impressive things about Denise Levertov's poetry is her ability to enter the private, inner world of another and express—in words—what the other is experiencing. In "Despair"¹⁶ she observes a woman who, like her, is mourning a loss:

While we were visiting David's grave
I saw at a little distance
a woman hurrying towards another grave
hands outstretched, stumbling
in her haste; who then
fell at the stone she made for
and lay sprawled upon it, sobbing,
sobbing and crying out to it.
She was neatly dressed in a pale coat
and seemed neither old nor young.
I couldn't see her face, and my friends
seemed not to know she was there.
Not to distress them, I said nothing.
But she was not an apparition.
And when we walked
back to the car in silence

¹⁶ Denise Levertov, *Poems 1968-1972* (New York: New Directions Books, 1987), pp. 12-13.

I looked stealthily back and saw she rose
and quieted herself and began slowly

to back away from the grave.

Unlike David, who lives

in our lives, it seemed
whoever she mourned dwelt

there, in the field, under stone.

It seemed the woman

believed whom she loved heard her,
heard her wailing, observed

the nakedness of her anguish,
and would not speak.

In "The Old Adam"¹⁷ Levertov focuses her attention on another despairing soul, this one an old man whose life was misspent because he did not get his priorities straight:

A photo of someone else's childhood,
a garden in another country—world
he had no part in and has no power to imagine:

yet the old man who has failed his memory
keens over the picture—"Them happy days—
gone—gone for ever!"—glad for a moment to suppose

a focus for unspent grieving, his floating
sense of loss.

He wanders

asking the day of the week, the time,
over and over the wrong questions.
Missing his way in the streets

he acts out
the bent of his life,
the lost way

¹⁷ Denise Levertov, *Poems 1960-1967* (New York: New Directions Books, 1983), pp. 120-

never looked for, life
unlived, of which he is dying
very slowly.

"A man,"
says his son, "who never
made a right move in all his life." A man

who thought the dollar was sweet and
couldn't make a buck, riding the subway
year after year to untasted sweetness,

loving his sons obscurely, incurious
who they were, these men, his sons—
a shadow of love, for love longs

to know the beloved, and a light goes with it
into the dark mineshafts of feeling . . . A man
who now, without knowing,

in endless concern for the smallest certainties,
looking again and again at a paid bill,
inquiring again and again, "When was I here last?"

asks what it's too late to ask:
"Where is my life? Where is my life?
What have I done with my life?"

The tone of this poem is not condemnatory—she lets the man's son render the harsh judgment that he "never made a right move in all his life"—but she is not merely sympathetic either, for this would be to ignore how tight and thoughtlessly he lived his life, as reflected now in his confused preoccupation with the "smallest certainties."

In "A Solitude"¹⁸ Levertov tells about her encounter with a blind man who accepts her offer of help. Here her empathy is expressed in her realization that while he accepted her offer of assistance he also prized his capacity to be alone:

A blind man, I can stare at him
ashamed, shameless. Or does he know it?
No, he is in a great solitude.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

O, strange joy,
to gaze my fill at a stranger's face.
No, my thirst is greater than before.

In his world he is speaking
almost aloud. His lips move.
Anxiety plays about them. And now joy
of some sort trembles into a smile.
A breeze I can't feel
crosses that face as if it crossed water.

The train moves uptown, pulls in and
pulls out of the local stops. Within its loud
jarring movement a quiet,

the quiet of people not speaking,
some of them eyeing the blind man,
only a moment though, not thirsty like me,

and within that quiet his
different quiet, not quiet at all, a tumult
of images, but what are his images,

he is blind? He doesn't care
that he looks strange, showing
his thoughts on his face like designs of light
flickering on water, for he doesn't know
what look is.

I see he has never seen.

And now he rises, he stands at the door ready,
knowing his station is next. Was he counting?
No, that was not his need.

When he gets out I get out.
"Can I help you towards the exit?"
"Oh, alright." An indifference.

But instantly, even as he speaks,
even as I hear indifference, his hand
goes out, waiting for me to take it,

and now we hold hands like children.
His hand is warm and not sweaty,
the grip firm, it feels good.

And when we have passed through the turnstile,
he going first, his hand at once
waits for mine again.

"Here are the steps. And here we turn
to the right. More stairs now." We go
up into sunlight. He feels that,

the soft air. "A nice day,
isn't it?" says the blind man. Solitude
walks with me, walks

beside me, he is not with me, he continues
his thoughts alone. But his hand and mine
know one another,

it's as if my hand were gone forth
on its own journey. I see him
across the street, the blind man,

and now he says he can find his way. He knows
where he is going, it is nowhere, it is filled
with presences. He says, I am.

The poet is able to enter the man's internal frame by sensing the emotional meaning behind his words, the indifference that lies behind his acceptance of help—"Oh, alright"—and the desire to be alone in his own "great solitude" which expresses itself in his seemingly meaningless observation, "A nice day, isn't it?" In entering his frame of reference, she abandons her own, which was to be more helpful to him than the others on the train who were "not thirsty like me." Yet through this self-abandonment something unanticipated and unplanned occurs, as they find themselves holding hands "like children," and "his hand and mine know one another." Something has happened, wordlessly, between them, and it is far more important than her initial desire to be of assistance to a man who "has never seen."

Levertov also recognizes what every caregiver learns, sooner or later, that there are limits to another's acceptance of one's empathic understanding. Even when she manages to suspend the desire to please and to judge, the

other has his or her limits, and it is altogether likely that at some point in the relationship the caregiver will be asked to go. Thus, in "Poet and Person,"¹⁹ she observes:

.

When I arrive, you love me,
for I sing those messages you've
learned by heart, and bring,
as housegifts, new ones. You hear
yourselves in them,
self after self. Your solitudes
utter their runes, your own
voices begin to rise in your throats.

But soon you love me less.
I brought with me
too much, too many laden coffers,
the panoply of residence,
improper to a visit.
Silks and furs, my enormous wings,
my crutches, and my spare crutches,
my desire to please, and worse—
my desire to judge what is right.

I take up
so much space.
You are living on what you can find,
you don't want charity, and you can't
support lingering guests.

When I leave, I leave
alone, as I came.

Still, Levertov understands that her task is to listen to the pain of others, whether verbalized or not. In "Vocation"²⁰ she describes herself as one who looks "with the eyes and ears concealed within me":

¹⁹ Denise Levertov, *Candles in Babylon* (New York: New Directions Books, 1982), p. 6.

²⁰ Denise Levertov, *Oblique Prayers* (New York: New Directions Books, 1984), p. 31.

I have been listening, years now,
to last breaths—martyrs dying
passionately

in open blood,
in closed cells:

to screams and surprised silence
of children torn from green grass
into the foul bite

of the great mower.

From a long way off
I listen, I look
with the eyes and ears concealed within me.
Ears and eyes of my body
know as I know:
I have no vocation to join the nameless great,

only to say to others, Watch! Hear them!
Through them alone
we keep our title, *human*,

word like an archway, a bridge, an altar.
(Sworn enemies
answering phrase to phrase
used to sing in the same key, imagine!—
used to pick up the furious song and
sing it through
to the tonic resting place, the chord,
however harsh,
of resolution.)

Nowadays
I begin to hear a new sound:
a leaf seems as it slowly
twirls down
earthward
to hum,

a candle, silently
melting beneath its flame,
seems to implore

attention, that it not burn its life
unseen.

LISTENING TO THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY

In each of the foregoing poems, Levertov's empathic understanding of the other is reflected in her awareness of the total organismic context in which feeling or emotion is expressed. She takes particular note of the body language and how it communicates what the other is experiencing emotionally. In "Despair" she notices the woman hurrying toward another grave with "hands outstretched, stumbling in her haste; who then fell at the stone she made for and lay sprawled upon it." In "The Old Adam" she observes the old man "keening" over a photo of someone else's childhood. In "A Solitude" she notes how the blind man's lips move as "in his world he is speaking almost aloud." These bodily images bring home the fact that it is not just the voice but the total organism that expresses itself. Her poetry is deeply attuned to the language of the body, and her own body is a source and means of understanding, as in "Vocation": "I look with the eyes and ears concealed within me. Ears and eyes of my body know as I know."

In "She wept, and the women consoled her,"²¹ a woman experiences the pain of her grief in every part of her body:

The flow of tears ebbed,
her blouse began to dry.
But the sobs that
took her by the shoulders and
shook her came back
for unknown reasons
and shook her again, like soldiers
coming back when everyone had gone.
History's traffic had speeded up and
smashed into gridlock all around her;
the women consoled her but she couldn't get out.

Bent forward as she was,
she found herself looking at her legs.
They were old, the skin
shiny over swollen ankles,
and blotched. They meant nothing to her

²¹ Denise Levertov, *Breathing the Water* (New York: New Directions Books, 1988), p. 45.

but they were all she could see.
Her fallen tears had left their traces
like snail-tracks on them.

They consoled her “but she couldn’t get out”—there is no escaping the body and its agonies. Her eyes see nothing but her swollen extremities.

In “The Blue Rim of Memory”²² bones are exposed to the stabs and pangs of sorrow. They are the locus of the spirit’s desolation:

The way sorrow enters the bone
is with stabs and hoverings.
From a torn page
a cabriolet
approaches over the crest of a hill,
first the nodding, straining head of the horse
then the blind lamps, peering;

the ladies within the insect eagerly
look from side to side awaiting the vista—
and quick as a knife
are vanished. Who were they? Where is the hill?

Or from stoked fires of nevermore
a warmth constant as breathing hovers out
to surround you, a cloud of mist
becomes rain, becomes cloak, then skin.

The way sorrow enters the bone
is the way fish sink through dense lakes
raising smoke from the depth
and flashing sideways in bevelled
syncopations.
It’s the way the snow
drains the light from day but then,
covering boundaries of road and sidewalk,
widens wondering streets
and stains the sky yellow
to glow at midnight.

²² Denise Levertov, *Life in the Forest* (New York: New Directions Books, 1978), p. 93.

If every part of the body is object and victim of pain, it is the heart that is most in danger of being overwhelmed by the pain. Yet in "The Heart,"²³ Levertov is impressed by the heart's resilience:

At any moment the heart
breaks for nothing—

poor folk got up in their best,
rich ones trying, trying to please—

each touch and a new fissure appears,
such a network, I think of an old
china pie-plate
left too long in the oven.

If on the bloody muscle its namesake
patiently pumping in the thoracic cavity

each flick of fate incised itself,
who'd live long?—but this beats on

in the habit of minute response,
with no gift for the absolute.

Disasters
of history weigh on it, anguish

of mortality presses
in on its sides

but neither crush it to dust nor
split it apart. What

is under the cracked glaze?

In a recent poem, "Broken Pact,"²⁴ Levertov tells how her heart's desire has weakened her body over the years, leaving mind and heart to figure out how to proceed without the body's active participation:

A face ages quicker than a mind.

And thighs, arms, breasts,
take on an air of indifference.

²³ Levertov, *Poems 1968-1972*, p. 18.

²⁴ Denise Levertov, *Evening Train* (New York: New Directions Books, 1992), p. 29.

Heart's desire has wearied them, they chose to forget
whatever they once promised.

But mind and heart continue
their eager conversation,
they argue, they share epiphanies,
sometimes all night they raise
antiphonal laments.

Face and body have betrayed them,
they are alone together,
unsure how to proceed.

The heart, then, is a powerful metaphor for Levertov for the spirit that lives in and through the body. To listen to the language of the body is to listen, above all, to the heart and its desires. If it often overreaches, demanding more than the rest of the body can commit to, it is, nevertheless, the body's spark of life, its source of courage.

While emphasizing the heart as expressive of the body's desires, she also pays close attention to the way the hands speak for the body. We saw this in her poem on the blind man who, in spite of his indifference to her offer of assistance, reached out and took her hand in his. In "Inheritance"²⁵ she observes that another woman's memory of kind and gentle hands becomes her own, soothing her as well:

Even in her nineties she recalled
the smooth hands of the village woman
who sometimes came from down the street
and gently, with the softest
of soft old flannel,
soaped and rinsed and dried
her grubby face, while upstairs
the stepmother lay abed bitterly sleeping,
the uncorked opiate bottle
wafting out sticky sweetness
into a noontime dusk.
Those hands, that slow refreshment,
were so kind, I too,

²⁵ Denise Levertov, *A Door in the Hive* (New York: New Directions Books, 1989), p. 90.

another lifetime beyond them,
shall carry towards my death
their memory,
grateful, and longing
once again to feel them soothe me.

Being one who listens, then, involves, for Levertov, hearing the body language of the other, feeling the other's confusion, anguish, pain, and struggle through her own bodily senses—"The eyes and ears of my body." The body of the other speaks when the words are not there, or slow to come. So, in a very real sense, her poetry puts words in the mouths of the silent and speechless, giving voice to what their bodies are silently saying. The reader of her poems could make the mistake of assuming that it is the subject of the poem who is doing the speaking when, more often than not, it is the poet who is finding words to convey what the body is wordlessly saying.

In the poem "She wept, and the women consoled her," the poet speaks for the body by means of metaphors that capture the sobbing woman's pain. There is the metaphor of the soldiers, reminiscent of Vietnam, who returned to the bombed-out village after the inhabitants had fled, and there is the metaphor of history's traffic having speeded up and "smashed into gridlock" all around her. There is nothing tender or wistful in these images. They are harsh images of a metallic, concussive, violent reality. They tell us that the woman's whole being has been senselessly attacked, and that she was and is without defenses, reduced to tearless sobs, and utterly inconsolable.

In "The Blue Rim of Memory" the metaphors are not as violent and unrelenting, but instead promise a certain way out. Here the way sorrow enters the bone "is the way fish sink through dense lakes" and "the way the snow drains the light." While they do not minimize the capacity of sorrow to depress and deplete the soul, these images also envision a way out. Unlike an obliterated village, or gridlocked traffic from which there is no escape, the fish is able to flash "sideways in bevelled syncopations" and the snow appears to widen "wondering streets" and to cause the sky to glow at midnight. Here there is the anticipation of the knife of sorrow being at last withdrawn, of new skin growing over old wounds, as "a warmth constant as breathing hovers out to surround you."

Levertov's poems on the various ways the body speaks in the soul's behalf suggest that the pastor's role, as empathic listener, is to leave the realm of abstract and disembodied spirits to others, and to enter the body's world, a world where a woman, bent forward, finds herself looking at her legs, "the

skin shiny over swollen ankles, and blotched." When one participates in the body's world, the very form of the communication changes, and something new and different occurs. The *type* of communication may be the same, whether concerned with turning points, self-disclosure, growing edges, or rehearsal, but its *tone* is very different, as the embodied quality of the conversation is recognized and raised to consciousness.

In illustrating the "turning-point" conversation, Noyce tells about a time when he was making a decision about a job—whether to move or to stay where he was. The need to make this decision was beginning to wear on him, as it was a hard decision: "Somehow when decisions come hard, I am tempted to think that one way is 'right' and the other way is 'wrong,' and more and more I fear that my choice might be the latter. Paralysis sets in and the decision gets even harder to make." In this instance, when he was slipping into such a paralysis, a friend said simply, "You'll be happy either way." Noyce says that his friend's words were timely and never forgotten: "It was like a word of grace, lifting a hidden burden from my shoulders."²⁶

Note, here, his use of embodied language: The decision is "paralyzing," and, in marked contrast, his friend's words lift "a hidden burden from my shoulders." No doubt the conversation between them had focused on the losses and gains that would result from staying put and from moving on, and no doubt such conversation had been clarifying, helpful to him in arriving at his final decision. But what especially comes through in his recounting of the conversation is the body language he uses to communicate to us both how the decision was wearing on him and how his friend's simple intervention brought such relief.

THE NONDIRECTIVE HANDICAP

This brings us back, full circle, to the nondirective handicap. Given the way that Rogerian listening has typically been taught and learned, the impression most pastors have of the nondirective approach is that it is largely a matter of paraphrasing the words of the other. The image that comes to mind is that of the pastor as a sort of walking thesaurus. The patient says she is afraid of death, and the pastor says "You feel frightened," or "You are apprehensive," or "You are terrified," or even, "It's kind of scary, isn't it?" These are all synonyms of "afraid." But, as we have seen, empathic understanding of and listening for the language of the body entails much more—and much less—than this walking thesaurus image implies. When our minds

²⁶ Noyce, *The Art of Pastoral Conversation*, p. 10.

take over, when they begin to work apart from and in alienation from our bodies, then we will resort to paraphrasing, to speaking the first synonym for "afraid of death" that enters, unmediated by the body, into our minds.

In embodied listening, it works very differently. When the other says, "I'm afraid of death," this saying is received bodily by the listener, and whatever the listener says, or does not say, by way of response, incorporates the visceral impact of these words upon the listener. In this sense, the listener responds with her own body language. Maybe the words that come forth are, in fact, words like "frightening," "apprehensive," "terrifying," or "scary," as these may well register what the listener has felt in the pit of her own stomach. But, the words, "I'm afraid of death," might also evoke in the listener an internal scream, a hot flash of anger, or a deflated feeling, a felt sense of how overpowering death is. No one expects that words as true and right as poetry will come forth, for, after all, the poet has the luxury—if we may call it that—of having spent days, even weeks or months, trying to find just the right word or phrase to convey what she has felt or is feeling now. But we can accustom ourselves to speaking from our own felt bodily sense of things, and to take notice of the body language of the other: "I notice that your hand is trembling" is likely to speak more truly than "It's kind of scary, isn't it?"

One of Carl Rogers' early associates, Eugene Gendlin, has written a popular book about how we can teach ourselves to listen to our own bodies, to become aware of our total organismic processing. Following Rogers, he talks about a "felt sense" that is different from perception and intuition: "A felt sense is the body's sense of a problem, or of some concern or situation. It is a physical sense of meaning."²⁷ In Gendlin's view, we can teach ourselves to become attentive to our own felt bodily sense and to articulate, with a high degree of accuracy, how we are experiencing this felt bodily sense at any given time or in any given situation. In pastoral conversations, it is especially useful and valuable if we are able to discriminate between the direct influence of our conversation partner's words and presence on our felt bodily sense, and other factors that are having an effect on our felt bodily sense, including factors in the immediate environment and ones that we brought with us to the present conversation, but which have little or nothing directly to do with it. Those of us who have had the opportunity to watch videotapes of Carl Rogers' counseling sessions have come away enormously impressed with his capacity to screen these extraneous factors and influences out, and

²⁷ Eugene T. Gendlin, *Focusing*, 2d ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 69.

to attend with his whole body to what the client is experiencing at that moment. James E. Dittes comments:

What is the therapeutic power of Carl Rogers, and how is it achieved? What selfhood does he portray in a "client-centered" therapeutic hour? The caricatures are right, or half-right: He seems a nonentity, mechanically parroting the client, bland. The things that we usually suppose make for personality and sense of self-presence are absent—sociability, opinions and attitudes, feelings and history. Watching him on film or in person, one had a sure sense that, if interrupted during a therapy hour and asked his name, he couldn't answer easily, so radically other-directed was this "non-directive" therapist, so totally abdicating of his distinctiveness and so engrossed in the other, so oblivious to the boundaries that construct and define the self. . . . But there is also a powerful sense of presence. A client, or an observer, has no doubt about having experienced an indelible personality, one who is decisively other even while—or because—strangely merged. Rogers emerges with a raw selfhood, an intense, primitive, generic presence, a kind of ahistorical, asocial, arelational selfhood in a world that is used to defining selfhood in historical, social, relational terms.²⁸

The point, of course, is not that we should all become imitators of Carl Rogers. Rather, what this description of Rogers' "presence" suggests to me is that there is, in fact, more of a connection than we might have thought between the listening phase of the pastoral conversation and the phase in which the pastor responds, in manner or in words, with the story that arises from faith. This understanding of listening as an act of self-abnegation (without self-abasement) is inherently Christian, as it recapitulates the self-emptying (making possible full presence) with which we associate the Son of God. It also reenacts the rite of Holy Communion, in which we relegate our minds to a secondary status, and, thus having emptied ourselves, take the body of the Other into our own bodies, so that when we speak—as we surely will—we speak the more primitive or primal language of the body's world.

THE HOSPITAL AND THE BODY'S WORLD

In light of our emphasis on learning to participate in the body's world, to listen to the body, and to speak in its behalf, it is significant that the most

²⁸ James E. Dittes, "The Mitigated Self," in *The Endangered Self*, ed. Richard K. Fenn and Donald Capps (Princeton: Center for Religion, Self and Society of Princeton Theological Seminary, 1992), p. 82.

common setting in which seminarians learn to engage in pastoral conversation is the hospital, the very place in our society where the body itself is the object of acute attention (and debasement). This connection between the hospital setting and the importance of learning to speak within and through the body's world has not, for the most part, been recognized, much less exploited, by those of us who teach seminarians how to engage in meaningful pastoral conversation. Yet it is interesting to note that Denise Levertov was herself a nurse during World War II, and is therefore exceptional among poets in her familiarity with the general hospital.

In "Death Psalm: O Lord of Mysteries"²⁹ Levertov writes about a hospitalized woman who was prepared to die but death did not come:

.

She did not die but lies half-speechless, incontinent,
aching in body, wandering in mind
in a hospital room.

A plastic tube, taped to her nose,
disappears into one nostril.

Plastic tubes are attached to veins in her arms.
Her urine runs through a tube into a bottle under the bed.
On her back and ankles are black sores.

The black sores are parts of her that have died.
The beat of her heart is steady.
She is not whole.

She made ready to die, she prayed, she made her peace,
she read daily from the lectionary.

She tended the green garden she had made,
she fought off the destroying ants,
she watered the plants daily
and took note of their blossoming.

She gave sustenance to the needy.
She prepared her life for the hour of death.
But the hour has passed and she has not died.

O Lord of mysteries, how beautiful is sudden death
when the spirit vanishes

²⁹ Levertov, *Life in the Forest*, p. 39.

boldly and without casting
 a single shadowy feather of hesitation
 onto the felled body.

O Lord of mysteries, how baffling, how clueless
 is laggard death, disregarding
 all that is set before it
 in the dignity of welcome—
 laggard death, that steals
 insignificant patches of flesh—
 laggard death, that shuffles
 past the open gate,
 past the open hand,
 past the open,
 ancient,
 courteously waiting life.

Note her physical descriptions of the woman, her incontinence, her bodily aches, her black sores. While the beat of her heart is steady, she is not whole. And why is death delayed? Why does death shuffle past the open gate and hand, past the open, ancient, courteously waiting life? The answer, if there is one, is hidden in the heart of the Lord of mysteries. Meanwhile, death continues to disregard the welcome that is set before it.

In "Death Psalm," as the title implies, Levertov writes in a manner that calls to mind the biblical psalms, those ancient examples of embodied language. Yet, if the ancient psalms speak of the body beset with pain, disease, and death, they also capture in words the body's capacity to sing from within. Listening to the language of the body requires that we attend not only to its sighs too deep for words but also to its affirmations of the goodness of life. In "A Man,"³⁰ Levertov writes about one who sings his life:

"Living a life"—
 the beauty of deep lines
 dug in your cheeks.

The years gather by sevens
 to fashion you. They are blind,
 but you are not blind.

³⁰ Levertov, *Poems 1960-1967*, p. 170.

Their blows resound,
they are deaf, those laboring
daughters of the Fates,

but you are not deaf,
you pick out
your own song from the uproar

line by line,
and at last throw back
your head and sing it.

This, too, is the language of the body.

John 3:16

by JAMES F. KAY

Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary, James F. Kay preached this Lenten sermon on March 7, 1993 at Toorak Uniting Church, Melbourne, Australia.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16 [KJV])

SURE, I memorized John 3:16 as a kid. Who didn’t back in the 1950s when Sunday Schools were thriving? Of course, I memorized it in good Protestant fashion in the language of the old King James Version.

John 3:16. Despite all the cultural ground shifting under our feet, isn’t it still the most famous, and perhaps most beloved, text in all the Bible?

And that’s just the problem.

When the Christian message is reduced to a sentence, instead of heard as a story, it’s so easy for that sentence to become a magic formula or a mesmerizing mantra.

I’ve seen this happen in the States.

John 3:16 turns up repeatedly at what you Australians call, “Gridiron,” and what I call, in my parochial way, “Football.” It often appears just as the wide receiver completes a forward pass by carrying the football over the goal line into the end zone for a TD. Right?

In short, when that happens in the stadium, six big points go up on the scoreboard. At that moment TV cameras and photojournalists all train their lenses on the end zone.

And something else is often captured in the process. Something you may not see until the photo appears on the next morning’s sports page. There in the background, some spectator is holding up a cardboard sign for all the world to see. And on it is printed, “John 3:16,” just as the cameras click.

They don’t even bother any more to write out the words. Only the reference appears on the sign. If we can just get the code number, it seems we’ve got the gospel. That’s always a temptation when the Christian message is taken for a cipher instead of a story.

For us, more sedate types, who would never think of arranging photo-ops for God, John 3:16 presents us with yet another problem. It is so engraved in our memory, so beloved, and so familiar we’re sure we already know what it means even before we hear it.

Isn’t that the way it is with a lot of church chat and preacher talk? We’ve heard it all before; and, frankly, we’re bored. We’ve heard it all before, and,

so, we never really *hear* it. The gospel of God's love has become so familiar and so user-friendly that we are no longer amazed by its majesty and mercy.

That's why the Christian message can only get through to us by sometimes taking the form of a bizarre story. And John alludes to just such a story right before he comes on to what we call, "3:16." "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (3:14-15). What's that all about?

Well John is alluding to one of the strangest stories in all scripture from the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Numbers. The people of Israel, wandering in the wilderness,

became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. (vv. 4-9)

Now that *is* bizarre! A tall tale indeed. No wonder we prefer safe slogans to strange stories. And what in the world does this serpentine story have to do with John 3:16? And what could it possibly have to do with us?

Just this: *When the gospel of God's love is lifted up among us, it draws out all of our venom and all that poisons the world.* The glory of God's eternal love for you, for me, and for the world only touches the earth through a cross—amid the vipers and the venom.

In the Gospel according to John, the Son of God does not ascend after Easter in a cloud of glory. No! For John, the Son of God is lifted up, but only a few feet off the ground on a cross planted in a snake pit.

And from his cross where he reigns, Christ is still speaking on this Lord's Day in Lent, and he is saying to all of us:

Let it go.

Let it all go.

Let all the backbiting go.

Let everything that poisons our lives,
that corrupts our community
and demeans our humanity,
let it go.

Let it all go.

Could this be what it means to be drawn again to Christ? Could this be what it means to look on the cross and to believe in him who loved us and gave himself for us?

To let all the stored up venom
that is killing us
just to let it go.

You see the good news from John's point of view is that Christ can take it all,

all the years of stored up venom.
Christ can take all the bitterness,
and bear it all away.

From John's point of view, God doesn't wait for us to get well before paying us a house call. Our situation is too grave for such gentility. God is already here, where God loves to be, with the poisoned and the perishing.

When we hear John 3:16, through the story of the snakes and the cross, we can do one of two things. We can either look away from the cross and, bottling up all the poison that is in us, simply perish; or, looking to the cross and letting loose our deadliest venom, we can begin to live anew.

So let it go. Let it all go. Let all the venom go! For the promise in the gospel story is this:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Thanks be to God!

Bearable Visions/ Unbearable Sights

by JOHN W. STEWART

John W. Stewart is the Ralph B. and Helen S. Ashenfelter Associate Professor of Ministry and Evangelism at Princeton Theological Seminary. He preached this sermon in Miller Chapel on January 26, 1993.

Text: Psalm 145

EVER SINCE I ventured into the preaching business a couple of decades ago, I have adroitly avoided preaching on this 145th Psalm—and for good reasons. I memorized this Psalm early in my childhood. It was the very favorite Psalm of our family. I learned it the same way I learned to speak and understand the English language. I was tucked into bed at night with my father or mother softly singing its cadences and gently reminding me of its certainties. It was repeated at every family crisis—births, weddings, funerals, feasts, partings, homecomings.

Only later did I learn that our experience in a little Scottish coal-mining community in western Pennsylvania was not so unique. Jewish folks of Jesus' day repeated this Psalm to themselves and others several times a day. It was composed as an acrostic; that is, each verse began with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Now acrostics are designed to curtail our leaking memories, and this Psalm was written and sung so that every Hebrew child could learn its grandeur more quickly and every aging Hebrew saint could remember its promises with little or no slippage.

But there is more, at least for me. This 145th Psalm is, arguably, the most extraordinary and the most satisfying statement about God in all of scripture, and, frankly, I've always been so intimidated by its genius that I am reluctant to comment on it from a pulpit, especially this one. So be patient as I try. The well is deep here and we have little with which to draw.

What moves me most about this exquisite poem of those ancient Hebrews is its vision of God. Here the transcendent reality of God commingles and interfaces with the promised graciousness of God. Here the metaphors of power and almightiness and sovereignty (God as King) blend and bond with metaphors of God as caring parent and friend. Here (if we dare use the terms) the strength of maleness and the tenderness (if you insist) of femaleness are conjoined, wedded. The two have become one. Here, mysteriously, strength and grace covenant together. Here God is envisioned and confessed as ineffably transcendent and undomesticated and yet, at the same time, God is near to all who call upon God in truth. Our powers of comprehension and description are so meager—humiliated—in the presence of such an inexplic-

cable God. How does one grasp such an inscrutable confluence of transcendence and intimacy?

I don't know whether Jonathan Edwards is a household name any longer here in Princeton, even though he is buried just a few paces away in this village's cemetery. Well, this American theologian *extraordinaire*, early on in his life, once tried to explain his vision of God to his father. Listen to how a young Edwards remembers it in his *Personal Narratives*, written in 1747.

I gave an account to my father of some of the things that had passed in my mind. . . . [how] I walked alone, in a solitary place in my father's pasture, for contemplation. And as I was walking there, looking up on the sky and clouds, there came to my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious *majesty* and *grace* of God, that I know not how to express. . . . It was a majestic meekness; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness. My sense of divine things became more and more lively [and] there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, a sweet cast, an appearance of divine glory in almost everything.¹

To my mind, Edwards' vision reflects the realities of this Psalm, namely, that the consummate use of God's power is the expression of caring; that the most total and satisfying use of strength is to love; and that the best and ultimate expression of kingliness is to parent and befriend. But such a vision edges us to the frontiers of our human capacities, to the margins of meaningfulness in human language. But listen again: "Men shall tell of thy awesome acts" and "The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down."

But is it true? I mean, is all this envisioning reliable? That is, in what sense can we Christians affirm that this Psalmist's vision of God is true?

Well, in the first place, the Christian community has to face up to the fact that there are many in our day, as in the past, who answer with a quick and firm "no!" A "no" that is full of pain and hurt and confusion. And we have to face up to the reality that such negative replies are currently being multiplied a thousandfold from Auschwitz, Cambodia, Soweto, the Gaza Strip, Guatemala, Bosnia, Somalia—and those places are only starters.

But let me bring this emphatic "no" a little closer to home. In one of Hans Küng's books he tells of a young theological student who, just before he took

¹ Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson, *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p. 60.

his own life, left this note for all of the University of Tübingen (and beyond) to ponder. It is almost too much to read in public.

I wanted milk and got a bottle.
 I wanted parents and got a toy.
 I wanted to talk and got a book.
 I wanted to learn and got reports.
 I wanted to think and got knowledge. . . .
 I wanted to be free and got discipline.
 I wanted to love and got morality.
 I wanted a calling and got a job.
 I wanted happiness and was given money.
 I wanted freedom and got a car.
 I wanted meaning and got a career.
 I wanted hope and got fear.
 I wanted to change and received sympathy.
 I wanted to live—. . . .²

And the young man's life, like the note, fades out—an intended veto of this Psalmist's vision of the reality of God.

What, then, are we in the Christian community to make of all this—this bearable vision of God as in Psalm 145 and the unbearable sights of the tragedy and pathos of human existence? We acknowledge we are in over our heads here. The well is deep here. So whatever I propose I offer delicately, hesitantly. As I say, I avoided going public with this Psalm for a long time.

I propose that one way to understand our common human existence—with its bearable visions and unbearable sights—is to start with the person of Jesus; and one way to understand this Jesus is to imagine or appreciate that in Jesus of Nazareth this vision of God in Psalm 145 becomes incarnate. That is, I propose that in Jesus the Christ this Psalm's mystery of the conjoining of power and love is made locatable—clarified—in this one who walked among us humans. John and the Christian tradition say that the believable Word about God became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. That is, God's identity with our humanity in Jesus Christ is so complete, so marvelously engaged that this Jesus—the one who speaks and tabernacles with common folk like Peter and Mary and Samaritans—is the fulfillment, the articulation of God's power linked with love, just like the

² Hans Küng, *Eternal Life* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 195-196.

vision in Psalm 145. That is, in Jesus of Nazareth ultimates about God became local, demonstrable, enfleshed. And, in the cross experience of Jesus, God addressed something and accomplished something in the presence of those unbearable sights of the human hurt—something final, something satisfying, something hopeful. And it is not too much to claim that, in Jesus' resurrection, the same powers unveiled by God in the beginning, at creation, were unleashed all over again. Or to say it another way: human history starts—it is made new—all over again at Easter. Even the death wishes of the created order will not pervert God's ultimate intentions, namely, God's freedom to exert all of God's power to love in order that all may have life. "For the Lord fulfills the desires of all who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them." When humanity had done our damndest, God's love-power intervened and raised Jesus from the dead. The mysterious realities unleashed at creation came into play all over again. The psalmist's vision turned into hope. Divine power and presence became believable. But let me address all this in a better way.

Not long ago in that paragon of scholarly prowess—the *Readers Digest*—there was a story about Thelma Perkins in western Tennessee.³ She was the head nurse in an intensive care unit (ICU) for newborn infants where a child had been born without a face. That morning when she walked into work she sensed something was wrong. "Don't look," warned another nurse. "It is not pretty." "What's wrong?" Thelma asked. "She has no face! No eyes, no nose, she's horribly deformed." The two nurses went into the ICU and looked into the bassinet. And Thelma understood. For a face there was little more than a mass of wet mucous membrane, a ragged opening for breathing and for feeding.

Thelma took the child and held the child close. [Might you sense the vision and power of the resurrection coming into play?] After a while she called a meeting of the ICU staff and announced, "I don't want to hear any more talk about the baby's appearance. And her name, her name is Alice. She has a purpose in this world and we are going to love her like any other newborn child." [Do you sense the emerging of the power of the resurrection?]

Well, Alice was too much for her overwhelmed eighteen-year-old mother, so Thelma talked to Ray, her carpenter husband. When Alice was six months old, Thelma and Ray took Alice home. She weighed only eleven pounds and couldn't even roll over. [Are you sensing the power of the

³ See *The Reader's Digest*, April 1983, pp. 70ff.

resurrected Christ?] Well, Ray taught her to walk. It took nine months. Alice followed Ray around by putting her finger in his pocket. She seemed to develop a radar instead of vision. By the time she was six, twelve major operations later, and by the marvels of plastic surgery [Are you noting the possibilities in the power of the resurrection?] Alice was able to enter Everett Special Education School with a vocabulary of 250 words.

Once at a Sunday School picnic, a church member seeing Alice blurted out, "Who is *that* in a place like this?" [Do you smell the stench of crucifixion?] "Why," Thelma answered, "this is our daughter, Alice. Wouldn't you like to take her hand?" [Surely, by now, you know about the beauty in the power of the resurrection.]

In some way or another we are all Alices, persons with unbearable sights within a hurting humanity. But because of this Jesus—and that first Easter—we will all stand face to face with the God who uses power to love. The Spirit's converting is already underway. The kingdom's reality is already unveiled. We are being fashioned to wholeness, a wholeness that is defined and empowered and sweetened into the likeness of Jesus our sovereign friend, a likeness and maturation that neither violates who we are by creation nor leaves us without hope of change.

And there will come a day, that day, when we will be given eyes to behold God and ears to hear; and, though our vocabulary will only be 250 words, we will be given lips to praise such a magnificent God. And in that day, the day of a new heaven and a new earth, a day when power and grace perfectly combine, we too will be privileged to join in singing words like these:

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. . . . He fulfills the desire of all who fear him, he also hears their cry, and saves them. . . . And let all flesh bless his Holy name, forever and ever.

Amen.

BOOK REVIEWS

Selden, William K. *Princeton Theological Seminary: A Narrative History, 1812-1992*. Princeton: n.p., 1992. Pp. xiv + 201. \$11.50.

A veteran academic administrator who served on three university campuses, was president of a college, directed the National Commission on Accrediting, and undertook assignments as consultant in higher education, William K. Selden has more recently been pursuing a second career as historian of institutions in the Princeton community. In this latter role he was persuaded to write this useful, quite compact narrative history of one of America's oldest and most important institutions of theological education. He has provided a readable survey of the story of an institution that started simply in 1812 as a Presbyterian seminary with one professor, three students, tenuous financial support, and a temporary nest in the College of New Jersey's Nassau Hall. It continues to be related to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), but now enjoys an extensive campus, enrolls more than eight hundred students from some fifty denominations, and employs a full-time faculty of nearly fifty members, two-thirds of whom are Presbyterians, but in all drawn from about a dozen communions.

The book will be of interest not only to students, graduates, faculty, trustees, and contributors to the Seminary, but to visitors to the campus and to theological educators everywhere. Having visited the campus often and studied in its excellent library, I was grateful for the opportunity to learn more about some of its influential teachers and administrators of past and present. Buildings that I had been in or gone by took on added meaning as I found out how they came to be built—and in time, many of them, renovated. Selden is at his best in describing the stage on which the many aspects of seminary education have been and continue to be played out, and in providing introductory sketches of selected leading members of the cast—though constraints of space necessarily limit this after the theological storms of the 1920s and 30s led to some sharp breaks with the past and to the reorganization and the rapid expansion of the school. Pictures of individuals and groups “on location” help to make the story come alive. Selden's attention to the role of administrators and trustees and how funds were raised supply details important to understanding a major American seminary.

On the first page of his preface the author notes that, as his background has been nontheological, he has depended on the helpful guidance of others, and has chosen some apt quotations in providing clues to the theological stance of the Old Princeton theology and the transition to new and varied theological trends. But this narrative history does not adequately point to the larger story of the Princeton theology; it focuses too narrowly on its central figure, Charles Hodge, so that the importance of that theological movement for the first century and more of the Seminary's life is not sufficiently stressed. Much of the groundwork has been done in various articles

and books (such as two volumes cited by Selden, Lefferts Loetscher's *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism: Archibald Alexander and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary* [Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983] and editor Mark Noll's carefully introduced collection, *The Princeton Theology, 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983]). Hopefully scholars may now make use of the historical institutional scaffolding that Selden has provided so well as an occasion to reread the primary sources and previous interpretations to give us a larger view of the Seminary's theological history from its earlier rigidity to its more recent ecumenicity, building on the institutional foundations here so aptly described.

Selden has carefully noted that, from the beginnings, other than Presbyterian students attended the Seminary, and that in time professors from other denominations became part of the faculty. There is an opening here for a later account to show the impact of Princeton Seminary on other communions through such distinguished graduates as John W. Nevin (German Reformed) and Samuel S. Schmucker (Lutheran). Meanwhile, this useful book provides a good overview of the life of a school that began as a pioneer of a certain carefully defined type of theological-educational institution and has remained in the forefront of the world of seminaries as it has had to confront various changes and conflicts.

[Editor's note: This volume can be ordered through the Theological Book Agency, Princeton Theological Seminary.]

Robert T. Handy
Union Theological Seminary

Taylor, Marion Ann. *The Old Testament in the Old Princeton School (1812-1929)*. San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992. Pp. xx + 380. \$79.95.

A powerful mix of continental education, Christian piety, intellectual acumen, firm orthodoxy, and academic inbreeding, the teachers of Old Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary in the nineteenth century forged an approach to the Old Testament that was influential far beyond the bounds of the Seminary. Nevertheless, it finally disappeared as quickly as did the "old" Princeton when Westminster Seminary was founded in 1929 and Princeton Seminary was reorganized. Marion Taylor, in the publication of her Yale dissertation, tells the story of that line of stalwart and scholarly defenders of the faith whose tools were Semitic philology, exegesis, and apologetics. It is a story, as Mark Noll puts it in his introduction, of the tension "between confessional fidelity and scientific research." Along the way, one encounters some of these worthies for whom the conversation with German critical study was a matter of some tension and doublemindedness: Germany was a place to study but also a serious threat to continuing belief in the Bible as the Word of God. In all of them, as Taylor demonstrates, a particular mix of Reformed confessionalism, Scottish common-sense realism, and linguistic abilities came together to effect a

formidable defense of orthodoxy that engaged the critical currents but primarily for the sake of demonstrating their general wrongheadedness and infidelity.

The central figures of this story are the two Alexanders—Archibald Alexander, Princeton Seminary's first professor, and his son, Joseph Addison—Charles Hodge, who taught Oriental literature between the two Alexanders, and William Henry Green, whose death in 1900 marked the end of an era. The directions set by these scholars would continue, however, for another thirty years in the work of John Davis (best remembered for his dictionary of the Bible), James F. McCurdy, Gerhardus Vos, R. D. Wilson, and Oswald Allis.

The most interesting figure in the mix, apart from Addison Alexander, is Charles Hodge. Hodge's identity with systematic theology in the nineteenth century was so strong, and his continuing influence in that field still so apparent, that many will not realize he began his teaching career as a biblical scholar, a teacher of Hebrew and Old Testament. His extended sojourn in Germany was primarily for the study of the Old Testament. It was his encounter with the German critical spirit in Old Testament studies, however, that helped make him aware of its threat to the faith and shaped his resistance to the inroads of nineteenth-century criticism, stemming an earlier enthusiasm for continental scholarship. His own early teaching showed a dependence upon Simon on matters of textual criticism and an acute sensitivity to the character of Hebrew poetry and the nature and uses of parallelism as he learned them from Lowth's lectures. Hodge's lectures on Isaiah reveal an application of the principle of the hermeneutical circle, but the partial way in which he makes use of it is indicative of the larger problem of his approach and that of his successors. He claimed: "The parts should be interpreted in coincidence with the drift and design of the whole, and that this general character and design may and must be learned before the details can be properly understood, is acknowledged in reference to all works w[h]ere there is any continuity in reasoning or logical arrangement." The first half of his sentence is surely correct, but Hodge steps out of the circle and is unwilling, at least in this formulation, to stress with equal vigor that the whole must be interpreted by the parts and the details. He already knows what the whole of Isaiah is. There are no surprises in store in the details that would evoke any reconsideration of the whole.

In a direct anticipation of one of the main currents of contemporary Old Testament study of the Psalms, J. F. Alexander called attention to the way in which pairs of psalms, or even more extended groups of them, are connected by particular expressions, subject matter, or historical occasion.

The treatment of the study of the Old Testament at Princeton breaks off properly with 1929. What follows is something new. What was left of the old school went to Westminster, and the names, for example, of Henry Gehman and Charles Fritsch, who later taught the Old Testament at Princeton to many ministers, do not belong in the lineage of the Alexanders, Hodge, and Green. The works of these older scholars are still read, perhaps more widely than those of contemporary Princeton

biblical professors; but, they are read within a particular circle of more conservative biblical scholarship that continues to resist the critical directions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Because this review is directed toward those who are closely associated with Princeton Seminary, it may be worth some reflection on the continuities and discontinuities between scholarship and teaching of the Old Testament at Princeton in the nineteenth century and what is now happening at the turn of the millennium. There is still the significant focus on languages, even when they are not required for graduation. Gifted students can take advanced languages, such as Aramaic, Akkadian, or Ugaritic, a practice fully evident in the nineteenth century, though the languages are not entirely the same. The preference for "inductive" and "scientific" over "deductive" and "speculative," that Taylor sees in the old Princeton school, is probably still true of the newer Old Testament scholarship at Princeton where theory does not run rampant (a tendency that will dismay some and please others). Historical-critical study is presumed, indeed, defended by some professors against the inroads of newer modes of reading scripture. But the contemporary interests in canonical and literary interpretation, features that may be found in earlier times in the work of Alexander, Green, Wilson, and others, are manifest in the ongoing work of the present faculty. The unity of the existing Old Testament faculty is found more in scholarly background, shared commitments, and friendship and less in ideology and denominational involvements than was the case a century ago. The conviction that the Old Testament is the Word of God, against which all our faith and practice is to be tested, is a part of the inheritance of the old Princeton school that is firmly retained. Confessional fidelity and scientific research are held in tension, but critical scholarship is not perceived as a threat to faith.

It remains to be seen, however, if the late twentieth-century faculty, much larger in numbers, can ever equal the stature and influence of its predecessors.

Patrick D. Miller
Princeton Theological Seminary

Allen, Diogenes, and Eric O. Springsted, eds. *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Leominster, England: Gracewing; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. vii + 308. \$19.99.

This anthology is a companion to Diogenes Allen's immensely useful 1985 survey, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Allen's earlier book filled a huge gap, since most theology students have little or no familiarity with the history of philosophy. He presented not only the historical influence of specific philosophers, from Plato to Gadamer, upon specific theologians, but also their fundamental differences, especially regarding the doctrine of creation. Countless seminarians have already benefited from Allen's clear and persuasive interpretations.

The new volume of *Primary Readings* by Allen and Eric Springsted supplies

extensive selections from these philosophers, again from Plato to Gadamer, and philosopher-theologians such as Anselm and Aquinas, with a few prefatory sentences on each. The selections are well chosen, with translations reprinted from the standard editions, but without notes. Anyone studying *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* will now have the opportunity to encounter these thinkers more directly, although they may still prefer Allen's synthetic summaries.

As an anthology, the collection should be evaluated only against Allen's earlier volume, not against one's own canon of pertinent texts. By that criterion, *Primary Readings* makes a strong companion to *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, especially for the modern period, and should receive a warm welcome. There is, however, a clear difference in the attention given to the premodern area. *Primary Readings* devotes two-thirds of its pages to Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Dilthey, Marx, Heidegger, Gadamer, Flew, and Wittgenstein. The first third of the book gives Plato and Aristotle approximately forty pages each and then jumps to Anselm and Aquinas to round out the premodern section. While these proportions may seem natural enough, they reverse the pattern of the earlier interpretive volume where Allen devoted two-thirds of his space to the ancient and medieval materials. Thus, the anthology has the usual gaps precisely where Allen's earlier book filled in the picture most effectively: between Aristotle and Aquinas, and then between Aquinas and Descartes. Specifically, *Primary Readings* supplies no support for two of Allen's most helpful chapters: chapter three on "The Platonic Tradition: The Stoics, Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius" and chapter seven on "The Beginnings of the Modern World: Nominalism, Humanism, and the Scientific Revolution." The leap from Aristotle to Anselm is especially drastic, given Allen's excellent exposition of Plotinus in the earlier volume. (When asked, the editors revealed that the gaps in the premodern materials resulted from the publisher's decision to cut fully one-third of their selections, in order to keep down the price of the volume.)

Despite these gaps, *Primary Readings* is still highly recommended as the obvious choice to accompany *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Any pastor with theology students or pre-seminarians in the congregation could strike a blow for philosophical literacy by ordering copies of both books as gifts.

Paul Rorem
Princeton Theological Seminary

Capps, Donald, and Richard K. Fenn, eds. *Individualism Reconsidered: Readings Bearing on the Endangered Self in Modern Society*. Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary Center for Religion, Self and Society, 1992. Pp. vi + 398. \$20.00.

This volume of readings resulted from an interdisciplinary course at Princeton Theological Seminary taught by the editors, who share a favorable stance toward individualism and a partiality for psychoanalytic discourse. It bears some of the marks of customized text production (e.g., economizing with small print size and

foregoing professional proofreading) but merits a reading on account of the significant issues it raises for discussion. The editors respect their readers too much to offer a one-sided set of readings. As a consequence, readers encounter both the merits and criticisms of individualism.

The first section takes its theme from *Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), as well as from that book's intellectual ancestor, de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. *Habits*, it will be recalled, distinguishes utilitarian individualism, with a focus on rights and self-improvement, from an expressive individualism, a celebration, even religion, of the self. Readings by Yehoshua Arieli, Bellah et al., Reinhold Niebuhr, and Jeffrey Steele trace the origins of utilitarian individualism in European philosophy and Christian religion. As a social condition, individualism is shown to be Janus-faced, entailing a retreat from public concerns as well as a voluntarist involvement in them on the part of individuals. The issue, raised by de Tocqueville and others, is whether this kind of individualism leads inevitably to the corrosion of all social bonds and a self-centered expressive individualism. With these essays, the critics of individualism have stated their case.

Part two begins with one of individualism's proponents, Ralph Waldo Emerson. His "Self Reliance" essay is as poetic as ever, at times ringing of intuitive truth, but occasional passages remind one of Max Stirner's egoism rather than traditional New England nonconformity. A second selection from *Habits of the Heart* describes similar contemporary American individual quests for intuitive truth and making one's own way, while a later essay by Bellah recalls de Tocqueville's distinction between egoism and individualism, a politics of interest versus a civic consensus among individuals. An empirical study gives material form to all this, depicting the dilemma of urban Mennonites who found their traditional communities too confining and who substitute service and philanthropy for community. This is followed by Emerson's "Divinity School Address," which sees religion as a happy sentiment that follows upon congenial thoughts and deeds and calls for preaching to move in the orb of present spontaneity rather than received doctrine.

Part three consists entirely of selections from the writings of David Riesman, whose critique of groupism balances Bellah's critique of individualism. Riesman was principally concerned about the loss of freedom and autonomy, which comprise a major facet of individualism. He self-consciously distances his individualism from an older ruthless one, noting the moderating effects of internalized social codes.

Part four resumes one of Riesman's themes—contemporary organizational pressures that threaten individuality. Particular attention is given to parodies of individualism—the bureaucratic use of individualist themes, the corporate spokesperson, and the therapist's model of the inert, passive self. Guy Swanson writes of the inherently manipulative nature of management and the modern depiction of God as the good Manager who accepts us as we are. Richard Sennett describes the subtle skills of management, its exertion of social control through a cool indifference that

causes shame in the person being controlled. James Coleman points to the power of corporate persons, fictions though they may be, David Popenoe to the global shift from familism to individualism, Michael P. Nichols to the propensity of the work world to steal presence from family life, and Stephen Frosch to the modern massive structures' potential both to threaten the self through disempowerment and to leave it room for creativity.

Part five consists of psychoanalytic essays on self-disorders and narcissism, by Christopher Lasch, Heinz Kohut, Ernest S. Wolf, Andrew P. Morrison, Ben Bursten, Alice Miller, and Helen Merrell Lynd. The editors suggest that narcissism is a parody of individualism, but I do not find the essayed explanation of infantile dynamics convincing. No doubt, readers who take more readily to psychoanalytic literature will value the inclusion of these essays in the volume.

The editors have effectively assembled a contemporary critique of modern culture, balancing the advocates of individualism with those of community. As is typical of such collections, readers will find some of the essays more persuasive than others.

Anthony J. Blasi
Muskingum College

Osmer, Richard Robert. *Teaching for Faith: A Guide for Teachers of Adult Classes*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. 240. \$13.99.

Teaching for Faith by Richard Robert Osmer may be the most useful guide for anyone who teaches adults, including pastors, Christian educators, and volunteers, since Sara Little's *Learning Together in the Christian Fellowship* was published in 1956. It is a practical book. It helps teachers decide what and how to teach. It is a thoughtful book. It helps teachers think about their teaching practice in ways that illumine the meaning of faith *and* to think about the meaning of faith in ways that inform their teaching. The book is well organized and clearly written.

Osmer contends that teaching is a ministry of grace. Since faith is a gift discerned in our responses to the grace of God in Jesus Christ and revealed in our trust in the goodness of God, we cannot teach faith or cause faith to happen through our teaching. As "a special human agency" through which God repeatedly addresses us, however, teaching anticipates the gracious activity of God by creating contexts "in which faith can be awakened, supported, and challenged" (p. 15). We do not *teach* faith, but we do teach *for* faith.

The contexts teachers create consist of the methodological dynamics growing out of the teacher's encounter with what is to be taught and the teacher's decisions about how to teach. This dialectic establishes the structure for Osmer's exploration of four interdependent dimensions of faith and four teaching practices: teaching for belief through lecture, teaching for relationships through discussion, teaching for commitment through a methodology of reinterpreting our life stories, and teaching for mystery through parable.

Teaching for Faith can easily be read as a thoughtful examination of teaching practice. It was written, however, to be used by teachers as a guide to their planning from biblical narratives and curriculum resources. Osmer guides the teacher, step-by-step, through decisions about which method to use, the development of an outline, the clarification of organizing principles, the development of the method's specific features, to helpful suggestions for the teacher's leadership of the session. The attention of the teacher is directed beyond the typical discussion of teaching techniques to the empowerment of the teacher's faith *for* the ministry of creating contexts to awaken, support, and challenge faith in those to be taught.

Osmer wrote *Teaching for Faith* to help congregations reclaim the task of becoming centers of practical-theological reflection—a challenge he posed in *A Teachable Spirit* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990). *Teaching for Faith* exceeds that goal. It models what it means to be engaged in a practical-theological enterprise with a rigor that should appeal to church leaders seeking to counter biblical and theological illiteracy, the privatization of religious experience, and the withdrawal from prophetic ministries in their congregations. A plan for using the book with a group of teachers and an annotated bibliography for further reading enhance its value.

I have only two quibbles with Osmer. Despite the disclaimer that lecture is only one method of teaching for belief and that discussion is only one method of teaching for relationships with God and neighbor, the simplicity of a schematic structure linking a specific methodology to a given faith outcome tends to obscure the complexity and variety to be found in the interplay of faith and teaching. A second concern centers on the lack of attention to the influence of diverse cultural perspectives on various teaching methods in the book. In this era of intensifying awareness of the influence of gender, socioeconomic situation, and cultural heritage on the ways people learn, I would have appreciated some discussion about the influence of these factors on each of the methods Osmer examines. These quibbles aside, *Teaching for Faith* should prove to be a long-lasting guide to the improvement of teaching in our congregations.

Charles R. Foster
Emory University

Forem, Paul. *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Pp. xiii + 267. \$39.95.

Pseudo-Dionysius, a Christian Neoplatonist who presented himself as a disciple of St. Paul—thus acquiring near-apostolic prestige and authority for many centuries—seems to have lived at the beginning of the sixth century in Palestine or Syria. He was only convincingly unmasked in 1895 and has had enormous influence on Christian spirituality in the East, and perhaps even more in the West. The Dionysian writings were seldom read by Western mystics in the way that their author

intended, being often adapted, especially by the Victorines and their later medieval successors, into a more "individualized," less liturgically oriented, and more affective form of spirituality, emphasizing union in love and in Christ, rather than in the more "intellectual" silence of unknowing in which Dionysius' negative theology culminates. If modern readers are to come to terms with such questions, they must learn to keep the ideas of Dionysius himself separate from those of his later admirers and reconstructors.

Rorem has produced a discursive commentary on the texts, availing himself of recent scholarship which has given us new and serious editions of the Greek (by Suchla, Heil and Ritter) and a most helpful new English translation (by Luiheid and Rorem himself). His method is to use the letters as an introduction and then proceed to a separate analysis of the *Hierarchies*, the *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology*. The result is less a line-by-line commentary, though there are elements of that, than a series of discussions of theological, mystical, spiritual, and liturgical features of the texts. Only limited attention is given to Dionysius' sources, whether pagan or Christian. (There is surprisingly little on Neoplatonism.) Dionysius is treated as a writer who controls his sources rather than the composer of a patchwork. This has obvious advantages, though it means that Rorem gives us less information than we might wish about the place of Dionysius in the thought of his day. And when Rorem touches on questions of orthodoxy (on christology, for example), he is somewhat inclined to sit on the fence or to list the views of modern critics without taking sides (see pp. 11, 129-130, 239). Instead of attempting to settle questions of orthodoxy or the traditional problems of the identification of the author, he is more concerned with Dionysius' account of baptism, the eucharist, church order, and the hierarchies of heaven.

A fair section of the book is devoted to the question of Dionysius' influence in the West, and such discussion usually forms the last sections of a chapter on the individual Dionysian work in question. There are methodological problems about this; the division of the Dionysian material means that treatment of Dionysian influence also tends to be divided up. We learn about the influence of the *Celestial Hierarchy* in one chapter and of the *Mystical Theology* in another; that means we find it difficult to grasp the impact of the Dionysian texts on particular medieval writers *as a whole*. The disadvantages of this are exacerbated by the fact that Rorem has not provided an index.

The discussion of the influence of the texts is introductory, though the notes give us considerable help in finding further and more detailed treatments. Perhaps it would have been better if Rorem had devoted a bigger volume exclusively to Dionysius himself, with a second on the medieval Western tradition. Nevertheless, the book provides an introduction to the medieval development of topics like hierarchy and angels (pp. 74-77), as well as to the probable Dionysian influence on the origins of Gothic architecture (pp. 77-83), and to commentaries on the liturgy. What perhaps will have the widest appeal, however (and this is a theme that pulls the two

halves of the book—the commentary and the study of influence—together), is Rorem's treatment of the medieval amalgamation of the Dionysian notion of union through unknowing with the belief that it is the love of God, through Christ, that both unifies and is itself the highest state. Here Rorem's method of treating, for example, the *Divine Names* and the *Mystical Theology* separately has its advantages. It enables one to see clearly how little there is about *eros* (as yearning) in the *Mystical Theology*, while leaving us to wonder whether medieval attempts to read into the *Mystical Theology* the *Divine Names'* account of God as the *eros* which drives us to ascent were (or were not) a misreading of the view of Dionysius himself. For an interesting feature of Rorem's treatment of Dionysius is that the *Mystical Theology* looks in some ways less "Neoplatonic" (because less infused with *eros*) than in Nygren's notorious caricature. But much more needs to be said of all this, and Rorem has certainly stimulated the appetite.

John M. Rist
University of Toronto

Childs, Brevard S. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. Pp. xxii + 745. \$40.00.

In 1970, Brevard Childs, Sterling Professor of Divinity at Yale University Divinity School, wrote a landmark study entitled *Biblical Theology in Crisis*. He argued then for the need of a new biblical theology and offered some tentative hints as to the shape it might take. Now, twenty-two years later, Childs offers to us a full-blown biblical theology based on his canonical approach to scripture. Childs has been building a foundation for his canonical approach through a number of published books and articles, including separate introductions to the Old and New Testaments and an Old Testament theology. But this latest book is the *magnum opus*, the culmination of a lifetime of commitment to biblical scholarship and concern for scripture in the life of the church. Childs' grasp of the fields of Bible, theology, and the history of biblical interpretation is amazingly broad and insightful. The lengthy bibliographies at the end of each of the sections invite the reader to further study and reflection on Childs' own assessments of various scholars and positions.

Childs begins with prolegomena outlining the history of the discipline of biblical theology, eight current models for biblical theology, and insights from six classic Christian approaches to biblical theology (Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin). His next section, "A Search for a New Approach," explores the ways in which his methodology seeks to move beyond various impasses within the discipline. Another large section surveys "the discrete witness of the Old Testament" through various biblical traditions such as creation, Mosaic traditions, establishment of the monarchy, exile and restoration, the prophetic tradition, apocalyptic, wisdom, and the Psalms. Another large section wrestles with issues of

history, theology, and interpretation in "the discrete witness of the New Testament" as it studies the church's earliest proclamation, the Pauline gospel, the four Gospels, Acts, and the material from the post-Pauline age. Childs then illustrates canonical exegesis in the context of biblical theology with two examples: a study of Genesis 22, the near-sacrifice of Isaac, and a study of Matthew 21:33-46, the parable of the wicked tenants.

The heart of the book is a 360-page section titled, "Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible." This is the most interesting and constructive part of Childs' study for it is here that he weaves together biblical and dogmatic theology through ten chapters that reflect on classic Christian topics and themes: 1) the identity of God, 2) God the Creator, 3) covenant, election, people of God, 4) Christ the Lord, 5) reconciliation with God, 6) law and gospel, 7) humanity: old and new, 8) biblical faith, 9) God's kingdom and rule, and, 10) the shape of the obedient life: ethics. Childs' discussions bring together the resources of both Old and New Testaments in an energetic and often polemical engagement with current theological options.

Several overarching concerns guide Childs in this latest and most comprehensive form of his canonical project. Childs continues to utilize and appreciate the results of the historical-critical study of the Bible. He argues that historical criticism is useful for recovering a depth dimension of the canonical form of scripture that can sharpen and aid our reading of the final form of the text (pp. 104-105, 722). Childs, however, objects to the Enlightenment's claim to confine the Bible solely to the arena of human experience (historical, sociological, or psychological explanations). Biblical theology must take seriously a dimension of scripture that historical criticism often excludes, namely, the function of the Bible as a witness or testimony pointing beyond itself to a divine reality external to the text. The canonical approach seeks to move beyond the location of biblical texts in specific ancient times and places as the goal of interpretation. The canonical approach seeks to uncover the various ways in which biblical texts have been shaped so that they may address and confront succeeding generations in witness to the ongoing reality of the living God.

Childs initially welcomed the new literary and narrative approaches to the Bible. They focused on the final form of the text and attempted to move beyond the old conundrum of the relation of faith and history that historical-critical studies raised. More recently, however, Childs has grown wary of many literary approaches that use categories such as "classic," "fiction," "realistic narrative," and "text-created reality" to understand the Bible. Such approaches have often enlivened the interpretation of biblical texts, but they have not resulted in "robust theological reflection" in the same league as that of a Barth or a Bultmann (p. 20). Literary critics often bypass the problem of biblical reality and referentiality of that which is external to the text, whether in terms of the reality of the world or of God outside of the biblical text. For Childs, such an approach severely undermines the theological enterprise of biblical theology.

Childs struggles to hold together both the multiplicity of biblical voices within the Old and New Testaments and the "basic Christian confession that all scripture bears testimony to Jesus Christ." In this sense, he argues, "there is a single, unified voice of scripture" (p. 725). Scripture functions as canon, as a rule of faith that sketches boundaries within which there is freedom and flexibility. All readers necessarily bring their own interpretive framework and assumptions that shape their readings. Nevertheless, such readings are also tested in light of scripture and in light of other interpretations in the history of Christian theology. Thus, biblical theology is a lively and dialogical move from "the partial grasp of fragmentary reality found in both testaments to the full reality which the Christian church confesses to have found in Jesus Christ" (p. 85).

Childs clearly acknowledges that he has not overcome all the problems and complexities of doing biblical theology today. The book is incredibly wide ranging in its comprehension of the field, and the reader will gain much and be challenged through a careful reading of this book. But Childs acknowledges that much still needs to be done. The primary purpose of this volume is not to give the final word. Rather, the purpose is again to put on the table the need for biblical theology and provide much-needed direction and illustration for what it means to do biblical-theological work in a post-Enlightenment context.

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Weinfeld, Moshe. *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1991. Pp. xiv + 458. \$34.00.

This is the first volume of a projected two-volume Anchor Bible commentary on Deuteronomy by one of its preeminent scholars. The author, Moshe Weinfeld, is Professor of Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Deuteronomy, of course, casts a long shadow in the Jewish tradition, just as it does in the Christian, particularly the Reformed, tradition. It is therefore refreshing to hear a Jewish voice in a major commentary series, especially in the case of Deuteronomy.

As one might guess, debates about the meaning and background of Deuteronomy have raged over the ages. In surveying these debates, Weinfeld's introduction runs to eighty-four pages and his bibliography to thirty-eight. Neither contains frivolous material, and very little is superfluous. Weinfeld's discussions are clear and well organized. In many cases his presentation of introductory issues is the best available, and his marshalling of the evidence to support his position often puts things in a way that opens the book up to new understanding, for instance, in his exploration of the relationship in form between Deuteronomy and the vassal treaties of the ancient Near East. Yet even in the case of so thorough a presentation as that of Weinfeld,

much is left out or left unsaid. Such, however, is the state of biblical studies as the second century of "critical" study of the Bible draws to a close.

The commentary itself follows the familiar Anchor Bible format, with a fresh translation followed by textual notes, notes on the language of the passage, and in most cases an additional comment on the passage overall. As with many other commentaries, in the Anchor Bible and other series, this format makes for choppy reading. If one were interested in, say, Moses' great speech in 4:1-40, one must read back and forth through pages of notes (of two kinds) and comments, all of them unconnected to one another save by their having a single text in common. In most cases, one must have the Hebrew text in hand to gain the full benefit of Weinfeld's comments. For those with the patience and ability to do so, however, such a reading amounts to a study of this seminal book of the Bible under the patient tutelage of a master.

These first eleven chapters of Deuteronomy are worthy of a full volume to themselves for two reasons. One is that they are distinct in form and content from the laws that make up the bulk of the remainder of the book (i.e., chapters 12-26). These first eleven chapters lead up to the presentation of the laws, and they do so through remembrance of what God has done before and what is required of Israel after.

The second reason lies in the importance of the material contained here. In these first chapters, we have Moses' recounting of the events that have brought the people of Israel from Egypt to the plains of Moab on the verge of the Promised Land (chaps. 1-3), Moses' oration on the beauty and supreme importance of the law (chap. 4), the giving again of the Ten Commandments (chap. 5, the first being in Exodus 20), and Moses' long sermon on obedience to these commandments (chaps. 6-11), including the *Shema*, the "Hear, O Israel" (6:4), which is recited daily in synagogues the world over. Clearly, these are texts to be dwelt upon at some length, in a way in which some of the individual laws that follow are not.

Weinfeld does a masterful job with this material, though again, one must be prepared to study and not just to read for the payoff. To take but one example, Weinfeld's commentary on the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4) makes use of Hebrew grammar, Hebrew and Greek ancient texts, rabbinic and modern scholarly viewpoints, and ancient Near Eastern texts in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic as well as many Old Testament texts as theological background. In the end, Weinfeld threads the needle between the two main interpretations of the sentence, which emphasize either the unity of God ("YHWH our God, YHWH is one") or the uniqueness of God ("YHWH is our God, YHWH alone"), by noting that, in the theological world of Israel and its neighbors, an assertion of the oneness of God was also an assertion of the uniqueness of God, and hence of the necessity of giving loyalty to that One alone. In other words, in the world of Deuteronomy, oneness involves aloneness. To encompass both these nuances, and because he thinks it grammatically correct, Weinfeld translates the verse "YHWH our God is one YHWH."

To some, this may seem a case of having one's cake and eating it too. But, in fact, Weinfeld's reading of the *Shema* is only one example of his judicious and even-handed interpretation of this theologically fruitful book.

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Green, Joel B., Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992. Pp. xxv + 934. \$34.99.

Since about 1980 scholars have turned with renewed interest, even passion, to historical study of Jesus of Nazareth. On the one hand, this research has been stimulated by a disenchantment with existentialism (that only the Jesus known in preaching is important), the consensus that Jesus was a devout Jew and needs to be understood within the Judaism of his day, and the world-wide recognition that we know far more about Jesus than about almost any other Palestinian Jew of the early first century A.D. (The only exception seems to be Paul [who was clearly from the Diaspora] from whom we have numerous letters and autobiographical comments.) On the other hand, this study is demanded by the vast amount of archaeological evidence from Jesus' setting, and other records, especially the well over three hundred Dead Sea Scrolls, which help clarify in an unexpected and unprecedented way the symbolic language, expectations, and apocalyptic theologies of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries.

The canonical Gospels, virtually the only source for reconstructing Jesus' life and teachings, have been examined in thousands of monographs, books, and articles in dozens of languages. The new methods, suggestions, and conclusions move beyond the old categories of form criticism and redaction criticism. It is widely recognized that the Gospels, including the Gospel of John, preserve, inextricably mixed, history and kerygmata.

The explosion of both primary data from Jesus' time and culture, and secondary literature is daunting to theological students, ministers, professors, and even New Testament scholars. There is a need for a guide and assessment of the important new insights, perspectives, and conclusions regarding Jesus and the Gospels. Does the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* fill this need?

The work is extensive and attractively printed and packaged; and, it is relatively inexpensive for such a reference work. The dictionary is edited by Joel B. Green (New College for Advanced Christian Studies, Berkeley) and Scot McKnight (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL); the consulting editor is I. Howard Marshall (University of Aberdeen, Scotland). It is designed to aid those who are "preparing for or engaged in Christian ministry in all its forms" (p. x). It seeks to present a report on the study of Jesus and the Gospels "which is both critically responsible and theologically evangelical" (p. ix). The last adjective may well concern many potential readers.

This dictionary, focused on Jesus and the Gospels, begins with "Abiathar" and concludes with "Zechariah's Song." Cross references, guides to pertinent articles within a discussion, indexes of Gospel passages and subjects, and a list of articles make the work useful for a broad audience.

Good discussions, not marred by blind evangelical distortion, include the following: 1) a clear statement that in early Judaism there is no evidence of a Messiah who will suffer a violent death (p. 106); 2) a presentation of the synoptic problem that concludes in favor of the two-source hypothesis (Matthew and Luke used Mark and Q), with its values and limitations; 3) the reader is advised to be open to the ways the Gospel of John may be influenced by the Synoptics (p. 795); 4) the new and improved assessment of the only remains of a crucified man is incorporated (pp. 147-148); 5) Psalm 22 has shaped the Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion (p. 151); 6) Josephus did refer to Jesus but the account has been embellished by Christian copyists (p. 364); 7) new data in the Temple Scroll have influenced discussions of divorce in the New Testament; 8) Jesus' eschatology was neither thoroughly apocalyptic nor "realized" (p. 21); 9) sociological approaches to the Gospels do help us transport scripture "through the ancient world to speak to the modern world" (p. 766); 10) Jesus did call God "Abba" because of an experienced intimacy with him, but this noun does not mean "Daddy" (p. 619).

Misleading are the following: 1) the "Messiah" in the Old Testament denoted an anointed king or priest (p. 107); it also denoted a prophet; 2) "the Essene orthodoxy" (which means that the Dead Sea Scrolls are to be identified as an Essene library—which, as leading specialists pointed out from the fifties, included documents written and copied somewhere other than Qumran) is not "beginning to break up" (p. 145); 3) the discussion of "Jews" in the Gospel of John fails to observe that *Ioudaioi* sometimes means "Judean leaders"; 4) that Rabbinics cannot be used to help reconstruct Jesus' message (without careful weighing of the evidence) is clear, but it is not easy to move from the wise recognition that Hillel's Golden Rule is probably not the source of Jesus' similar teaching to the affirmation that in early Judaism, in Pharisaic circles, the "negative form of the maxim was current" (p. 658) (Hillel's maxim cannot be taken textually back before the third century A.D.); 5) while it is certain that "Son of man" was not a title but a self-designation in early Judaism, it is far from obvious that "Jesus . . . identified his role with that of the figure in Daniel 7" (p. 781); 6) the presentation of "Son of David" in the Gospels should have addressed the possibility that, prior to Mark's redaction of the Bartimaeus story and some of the early strata behind Matthew, this title was not necessarily messianic and sometimes referred to Solomon (David's son).

Some problems: 1) the length of Jesus' ministry was perhaps one year (the Synoptics) or conceivably three (John) (p. 793); the reader is offered no guidance; 2) the good discussion of "hypocrite" should have warned about the problem of assuming that Pharisees were hypocrites (deceitful) both in reconstructing history and in relating to Jews today; 3) the discussion of Jesus' miracles is impressive in terms of

presenting twentieth-century debates (with ample reference to Bultmann), but fails to position Jesus' miracles within pre-70 Judaism (there is no mention of the Elijah and Elisha traditions, Honi, Hanina ben Dosa, Hilkiah, and Apollonius [who is clearly not Jewish nor pre-70, but whose miracles help us understand Jesus' own miraculous works and the transmission of them]).

A few minor errors can be found. For example, D. Harrington did not write *Kingdom and Community*; J. Gager did (p. 766—the problem was caused by adding a reference to Harrington between two to Gager).

In summation, this is an impressive work. It does successfully bridge the disturbing gap between scholars and pastors, by demonstrating that critical scholarship can enrich evangelical theology. The authors generally illustrate how important are the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and the Dead Sea Scrolls; and, they demonstrate almost in every entry that the evangelists present challengingly different accounts and viewpoints. The entries are well written, often by distinguished specialists. They are generally informative and reliable. I recommend this reference work for all who are interested in becoming better informed about Jesus and the Gospels.

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Mack, Burton L. *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. Pp. 275. \$22.00.

An increasingly common literary genre in virtually all academic disciplines is the book written by a specialist to make scholarship accessible and relevant to laypersons. Q, the source for the non-Markan material common to Matthew and Luke, might seem an unlikely subject for this genre. But in fact the time is right for such a work. Scholarship on Q has come into its own in recent years, yet few laypersons have ever heard of Q, and not many more pastors have considered it as anything other than half the answer to their New Testament 101 exam question, "What are the sources in the two-source hypothesis?"

In *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*, Burton L. Mack, the John Wesley Professor of New Testament at the School of Theology at Claremont, sets out to demonstrate to the "literate public" that Q is considerably more than part of the solution to the synoptic problem. Having discovered in Q a story of Christian origins that differs dramatically from the popular conception derived from the canonical Gospels, Mack aims to expose Q's radical challenge to the conventional view in order to stimulate the "process of defamiliarization" that he wants Christians to undergo with respect to the origin of their religion. Since it is a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, this volume is sure to receive a wide reading among its intended audience.

The point of departure for *The Lost Gospel* is the thesis, first worked out by John

Kloppenborg and now widely accepted by Q scholars, that the text of Q, as critically reconstructed from Matthew and Luke, exhibits three discernible layers, which represent three stages in its development (designated Q¹, Q², and Q³). It is the genius of Mack's approach to move from Kloppenborg's literary history to a reconstruction of the socioreligious history of the group that produced Q, correlating the literary history with the picture drawn by contemporary scholarship of the social, political, religious, and intellectual world of first-century Galilee.

In the earliest period in the group's history, as reflected in the core material of Q¹, Jesus is presented as a Cynic-like sage pronouncing maxims and imperatives. When, in response to threats from outsiders, the Q group incorporated the apocalyptic material (such as the announcements of judgment) at the Q² stage, Jesus begins to assume more of a prophetic role. Finally, in Q³, Jesus is reimagined not only as a sage and prophet but as the divine son of God. Early Q people, Mack concludes, were Jesus people, not Christians. They did not consider Jesus to be a miracle worker or the Jewish messiah, or his teachings to be an indictment of Judaism. They did not regard his death as redemptive, and they did not imagine that he had been resurrected as Lord of the universe. "Instead, they thought of him as a teacher whose teachings made it possible to live with verve in troubled times" (p. 4).

Mack's reconstruction of the history of the Q group is quite plausible; many will find it persuasive. Certainly future scholarly treatments of the subject will have to reckon with it. Since Mack is writing for the nonscholar, however, his argument would have been strengthened at several key points had he explained to his readers why they should join him in accepting the results of previous scholarship (e.g., Kloppenborg's dating of the apocalyptic material after the wisdom strand and the Q group's ignorance of the redemptive nature of Jesus' death).

The most problematic aspect of the book is its treatment of Jesus. Mack generally limits his discussion to the "earliest stage of the Jesus movement" (p. 110), when Jesus' followers "remembered him as a Cynic-like sage" (p. 115). But on pages 37-38 it becomes clear that Mack, despite his reticence to say so, accepts the Q group's memory of Jesus as historically accurate. He pronounces most scholarly treatments of the historical Jesus, and the traditional criteria for isolating authentic words of Jesus, *passé* (pp. 62-64, 191-192). Because the Q community was "there at the beginning," he insists, its testimony to Jesus cannot be dismissed (p. 245). But Mack's literate public deserves a much fuller discussion of his criteria for moving from the earliest layer of the Q tradition back to the life of Jesus, especially in light of Mack's insistence that Q is itself the product of a mythmaking process.

Furthermore, since Mack wants his work to be read as a contribution to historical Jesus research, he needs to explain why he excludes other very early, non-Q traditions about Jesus, most notably the miracle traditions. This lacuna is crucial since Mack does not suggest how a Galilean Cynic could have attracted the attention and provoked the hostility that resulted in the most concrete datum we have about the historical Jesus, namely, his crucifixion in Judea. In short, Mack's treatment of the

Jesus of Q is much more thorough and persuasive than are his comments on the Jesus of history.

Mack hopes *The Lost Gospel* will convince those who still read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as history that these Gospels, like Q, are products of mythmaking and, therefore, not beyond criticism. Furthermore, he shares with a number of contemporary biblical scholars a salutary desire to allow ancient traditions stifled by canonical history to speak again. For Mack, the Jesus of Q challenges the canonical Gospels' presentation of vicarious crucifixion and apocalyptic destruction as symbols for solving critical problems. While many will resonate with his desire to find a Christian mythology not rooted in violence, Mack offers few suggestions about how he would reconfigure Christian theology and what role the canonical Gospels would play in that theology and in the life of the contemporary church.

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Lührmann, Dieter. *Galatians*. Translated by O. C. Dean, Jr. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. Pp. x + 161. \$24.95.

This English translation of a commentary on Galatians originally published (in German) in the Zurich Bible Commentary series (1978; 2nd ed. 1988) seeks to communicate the results of sophisticated scholarship to "any interested reader" (p. vii). The author, Dieter Lührmann of Marburg University, provides a brief introductory section, 115 pages of commentary, and a set of appendices (one an outline of Paul's career and the other a theological discussion). Included as well are an extensive bibliography, an index of biblical references, and an index of names and subjects.

Lührmann suggests that many readers will discover that his interpretation is very "Lutheran" (p. vii). It is that, especially in the way it interprets the distinction between "faith" and "the law" in Galatians. "Faith," Lührmann stresses, always means "faith in the crucified Christ," which implies that the contrast in Galatians is ultimately between the law and the cross of Christ.

Lührmann understands this contrast as a distinction between two fundamentally different ways of interpreting reality. The law, he maintains, was understood by Jews in Paul's day not only as an ethical code but above all as an interpretation of the world and as the "mediator" between "promise and experience" (pp. 47, 65). The Jewish people looked to the law in order to know how they might experience God's blessing (by keeping the law and learning the way of the cosmos that it disclosed) and to make sense of their experience when the promised blessing was not realized. Nevertheless, Lührmann suggests, the law was never able to mediate successfully between what it promised and what the Israelite people actually experienced in history, namely, suffering, defeat, and foreign rule. The Israelite confession of faith, informed by the law, became increasingly divorced from the Israelites' actual expe-

rience. At best one could discern in the law a basis for hoping that the promise and experience would be reconciled at the end of the world (apocalypticism). But in the present, one was confronted with the fact that faithful obedience to the law did not bring God's promised blessing.

By contrast, Paul's gospel, which centers in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, provides "the reconciliation between promise and experience" (p. 65). If I understand him rightly, Lührmann is saying that the gospel mediates successfully between promise and experience by making both the cross and the resurrection definitive of the believer's identity and experience in Christ. Lührmann is a bit elusive in the way he describes the experience of believers on the basis of the gospel, perhaps because he does not want to turn the gospel into a new law. But the main point of this commentary is that theology, for Paul, means answering the question, "How can one succeed in formulating a valid interpretation of experiences that people have with themselves, with God, and with the world?" The key, for Paul, "lies in the Christology of the cross, in which confession and experience coincide" (p. 99). Thus the believer's new identity provides a new interpretation of experience. It also makes ethical life possible in a way that the law allegedly never could. Believers can live for others because they already know their own selves (their own identities) to be secure in Christ (p. 105).

Lührmann has written a powerful commentary of great existential significance, especially for those preoccupied with the question of whether human existence is meaningful or not. My only criticism is that he tends to define God's gift in Christ too exclusively in terms of *understanding*, as if Paul and the Galatians did not know that gift in all sorts of other ways as well, not only as an interpretation of experience but as an experience itself that is not reducible to understanding; for example, as miracle and, one presumes, the "ecstatic babbling" (p. 13) that Lührmann evidently finds distasteful (and un-Pauline?). At most points in the commentary (an exception being the remarks about the Spirit on p. 52) one would hardly guess that Lührmann understands the Spirit (or the life of the Spirit) to include such charismatic content. But surely it did for Paul, whether we of the "knowledge class" like it or not.

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Nebelsick, Harold P. *The Renaissance, the Reformation and the Rise of Science*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992. Pp. xxi + 237. \$29.95.

The main argument of this book is that Christianity contributed to the rise of modern science, especially through its doctrine of creation, its doctrine of redemption, and its doctrine of work. The author, the late Harold P. Nebelsick, published previously on other episodes in the interaction of science and theology in *Theology and Science in Mutual Modification* (1981, on the twentieth century) and *Circles of God: Theology and Science from the Greeks to Copernicus* (1985). The present volume

was intended as completing a trilogy. It was written at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton but not completely finished when interrupted by the author's death.

The first chapter deals at length with Christian criticisms of Aristotle. In this chapter, the argument reaches back far beyond the period of Renaissance and Reformation to the medieval period and even farther to Philoponos of Alexandria (c. 490-566). The second chapter focuses on the Renaissance, especially the appropriation of Plato, Plotinus, and the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a collection of texts in that time mistakenly taken to be of ancient Egyptian origin. These different movements were not themselves scientific, but they did contribute to the demise of a sterile Aristotelian rationalism and thus encouraged the rise of modern science. However, imaginative thought needed to be controlled by a less speculative thinking. The mystical emphasis on divine or spiritual immanence had to be replaced by a stronger sense of divine transcendence. Demythologizing the world by understanding it as creation was the influence of the Protestant Reformation. In the chapter on the Reformation the author considers the biblical understanding of creation. With a discussion of Francis Bacon, the book ends somewhat suddenly and incompletely due to Nebelsick's death. Among pieces that have not been included by the editors are materials on Johannes Kepler and Giordano Bruno.

Nevertheless, the three elements of the title, *The Renaissance, the Reformation and the Rise of Science*, are all present in the text. In emphasizing the Renaissance, both as a liberation from earlier conceptions and as a period of speculative thought foreign to modern science, the view of the rise of science presented here is much more nuanced—and thereby more plausible—than the simple thesis that the Reformation was the matrix in which science arose. The argument seeks to establish that the Reformation was essential, correcting the exuberance of Renaissance thought. That fits well with the author's emphasis on transcendence rather than immanence. There is an implicit sense of progress as well as an implicit view of science behind this book. Though I think the view of science is right, it is disputed today. It will not be shared by those who hold that science is now moving towards a more holistic and spiritual view of reality. As such, the book provides interesting background information to contemporary "alternative" (postmodern, New Age) thinking, where various ideas from the Renaissance recur in different forms. One more comment: This book focuses almost exclusively on the history of ideas; the influence of technology and social structure on the rise of science is left aside.

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Burrows, Mark S. *Jean Gerson and De Consolatione Theologiae*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991. Pp. xiv + 312. DM 148.

In this book Mark Burrows, the recipient of the 1989 Sidney E. Mead Prize, presents and evaluates Jean Gerson (1363-1429) both within his historical horizon and in relation to current issues in theology and pastoral ministry. Gerson's historical context includes the Avignon Papacy, the Great Schism, and the Council of Constance. The reform-minded university chancellor and author of *De Consolatione Theologiae* (1418) is carefully portrayed as a progressive, but conservative, reformer of theology and the church; he had a keen concern for both theory and practice in theology and ministry.

In Burrows' careful and learned treatment, the *Consolation of Theology* is described as a pastoral handbook on theology that argued for the de-professionalization and democratization of theology. Everyone needs consolation, or a firm and solid hope, on the way to God. Theology is well suited for this task through its reliance upon scripture, faith, and charity. Gerson, the *doctor christianissimus*, emphasized the transformational role of theology for all manner of persons.

As Gerson conceived it, the task of theology is to mediate the divine revelation in understandable form. Theology is not, after all, a strictly academic enterprise, serving the professional guild alone, but a vocation intended for the edification of the entire church. A theologian's erudition is rooted not only in thought but in life itself. Theologians must express themselves with simplicity and concentrate upon useful matters necessary for salvation and for the consolation of all who are overwhelmed with desperation. To many of our contemporary professional theologians, Gerson would protest that theology should not be a discussion confined to the academy alone.

After an introduction to the "Text as Literature" (chap. 2), Burrows' comprehensive and systematic treatment covers the *Consolation's* pedagogy and method (chap. 3), the work's biblical and pastoral theology (chap. 4), its soteriology (chap. 5), and its ecclesiology (chap. 6). The *Consolation* itself is an unsystematic dialogue covering four days. Burrows, by contrast, provides a helpful thematic and systematic treatment while exegeting the text. He simultaneously analyzes the text and the modern secondary literature about Gerson.

Current scholarly assumptions and late-medieval surveys place Gerson in the Ockhamist tradition. According to Burrows, the Council of Constance and the threat of the Hussites provoked a ground-breaking period in Gerson's career; he changed his mind about the mainstream Ockhamist theology. He adopted a radical Augustinian anthropology and a soteriology that stressed the futility of all human contributions to the process of salvation. By giving one text a detailed and critical reading rather than surveying a whole range of works, Burrows proposes a revisionist approach to the study of Gerson and his place in late-scholastic theology. In the *Consolation* Gerson underscores the "sufficiency" of scripture as the norm for doc-

trine and life, advocating a decidedly anti-Pelagian understanding of justification and, finally, a reforming posture that is not overzealous and respects the traditions of the church.

For Gerson, according to Burrows, scripture is sufficient for salvation and the theological task. The church is the normative interpreting community, understood not as the current hierarchy, but as the history of interpretation, with special emphasis on that of the early church. This tradition is not another source of revelation that extends the canonical boundaries, but it serves as a guide in resolving exegetical difficulties. The ecclesial tradition provides the "sense" of the text so that interpreters are prevented from manipulating the text to justify their own desires. This is good counsel even today for all who must regularly interpret the scriptures. Modern exegetes need not always invent some new interpretation, but they can frequently find the sense of the text explicated in the commentaries and sermons of the early writers.

As a result of his shift after the condemnation of Hus at Constance, Gerson can no longer be said to belong to the mainstream of the Ockhamist School. In the *Consolation* he rejects any positive anthropology based upon human potential and a doctrine of merit—the notion that God rewards those who do what is in them and whose good works have been seen beforehand. Gerson substitutes the priority of divine election for merits foreseen by God. Second, he describes a covenant with seekers based on Hebrews 11:6, in which God promises to reward those who seek God through faith given them in Christ. Burrows is admirably careful about making anachronistic comments concerning Gerson's "Reformation" ideas, calling him instead a mediating theologian. Nevertheless, he does note Luther's appreciation for Gerson's treatment of temptations in the Christian's life. God actually wills *tentationes* (*Anfechtungen*) for pilgrims in order to bring them to the point of despairing about their potential. Consolation for every pilgrim comes from the outside.

Burrows describes Gerson as a patient reformer rooted squarely in the empirical realities and frustrations of the earthly church, which remains only a shadow of the church to come. Gerson is careful to distinguish this eschatological vision from his own reform efforts. His posture is a blend of toleration and reform, of conservatism and progressivism. It was the overzealousness, apocalypticism, and neo-Donatism of the Hussites that threatened the possibility of real reform in his day. Those who wish to reform the disordered ecclesial institutions of our day would do well to take a lesson from this reform-minded university chancellor. Since ecclesial institutions are now more fragile than ever, reform may have to occur within the "mixed body" and not over against it.

This finely crafted volume is strengthened by the fact that it is about one thing, Gerson's *De Consolatione Theologiae*. I have only two minor concerns. There is a typographical error in the table of contents (In III, B, 2, there should be an additional "i" in "*experientia*"). I also wish that Burrows had researched the history of the

exegesis of Hebrews 11:6 so important to the *Consolation* and the groundshift in the work. We can expect much from this careful, prize-winning scholar.

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Philadelphia, PA

Parker, T. H. L. *Calvin's Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. xiii + 202. \$22.99.

This is a serious book for the serious preacher. It is the kind of book one wants to read slowly. It gets one thinking about one's own preaching, what it is and what it should be. It is written in a brief, clear, and simple style. This book was written for preachers who every week try to preach the Word of God in such a way that God is glorified and the congregation edified.

It is a practical book and at the same time a scholarly book. T. H. L. Parker is the kind of scholar who has spent a lifetime doing careful and exacting studies of Calvin and his work. It was in 1947 that he published his first book on Calvin's preaching ministry, *The Oracles of God*. Since then he has edited the critical edition of Calvin's sermons on Isaiah 30-41 found in the *Supplementa Calviniana*; he has written a major biography on the Genevan reformer; and in addition to all this he has borne the responsibility of a parish priest in the Church of England, preaching every Sunday. It is hardly surprising that this book is such a remarkable combination of the scholarly and the practical!

One does not often have the opportunity, forty-five years later, to rewrite a book one has written early in one's career. Parker's earlier book still has much of interest to tell us, but his more recent volume refocuses on several subjects. Most notable is Parker's fresh treatment of how Calvin understood the authority of scripture. When looked at very carefully Calvin's approach does not quite fit into the grid of the contemporary discussion. If Parker is right, the contemporary combatants might have a hard time lining up the sixteenth-century reformer on either side. For Calvin, it is enough to say that the Bible has authority because God is its author. Parker also throws new light on the question of the authority of the preacher and just how it is that the preached Word is the Word.

Much has been said about Calvin's style, and quite rightly, for he is indeed one of those who shaped the French language. Parker concentrates, here, on Calvin's pulpit style. Others have shown how Calvin, especially with his written style, helped form *la clarté française*. In the pulpit Calvin is simple, familiar, and unadorned, the very soul of Protestant plain style.

Of particular help for today's preacher is Parker's discussion of what Calvin meant by expository preaching. It was here the sixteenth-century Reformation centered its reform. As the Reformers saw it, the Reformation was above all a reform of

preaching. They wanted to replace Scholastic preaching, devoted as it was to its ingenious introductions, its three-point outlines, and its human-interest stories, with something more classical. They were determined to restore expository preaching. Parker shows us just what Calvin meant by this. First, it was a simple explanation of the biblical text, going through whole books of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, it was an application of the biblical message to the lives of the hearers and, as Parker so pointedly puts it, to the life of the preacher as well.

As one reads along one cannot help wondering about our preaching today. If Parker is right, it hardly bears any resemblance to Calvin's preaching at all! Amazingly, the preaching one hears in most of our churches has all the characteristics, not of the preaching of the Reformers, but of the Scholastic preaching of the late Middle Ages.

Hughes Oliphant Old
Center of Theological Inquiry

Forstman, Jack. *Christian Faith in Dark Times: Theological Conflicts in the Shadow of Hitler*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. 261. \$23.00.

For anyone whose social memory includes the drama of Nazi Germany's rise, domination, catastrophic collapse, and the struggle of the church in its midst, this book is absorbing to read. It is history; it is another culture; but, it lives for our place in time in dozens of ways that the author suggests or that suggest themselves. It is theology, serious combative theology, among giants who had no doubt that what and how one believes directly determines how one acts in face of the culture, the power and the ideology—in this case German and finally Nazi—of the world.

Forstman, a professor of theology at Vanderbilt, leads us through these theological conflicts blow-by-blow, in a series of short chapters that lead one on each to the next like scenes in a fast-moving drama. His principals are six theologians of the period: three—Emanuel Hirsch, Friedrich Gogarten, and Paul Althaus—who in various degrees supported Hitler's National Socialism, and three—Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, and Karl Barth—who opposed it. His materials are largely the letters and articles they wrote to and against each other, though the book begins with synopses of Barth's early dialectical theology in *The Epistle to the Romans* and Hirsch's "theistic metaphysics of history" in his 1920 work, *Germany's Destiny*.

The relationships among these protagonists were not simple, and they changed dramatically over the years. The religious socialist Tillich and the German nationalist Hirsch were close friends and intellectual allies until Hirsch threw himself into the Nazi movement and Tillich, expelled from his chair in Frankfurt, fled to America. Barth and Gogarten were allies and co-editors of *Between the Times (Zwischen den Zeiten)*, the journal of the dialectical-theology movement, until Gogarten gave his provisional approval to Hitler. Barth and Bultmann only found each other in the church struggle. Barth fully expected Bultmann, given his affinity for natural

theology, to go Nazi, at least in the tentative manner of Althaus and Gogarten, who welcomed the new regime at first but then fell silent when, especially in the persecution of the Jews, its enormity became evident.

Forstman chronicles all of this and more with dispassionate sympathy, allowing each figure to emerge in his own theological and personal profile, and tracing their theological arguments in patient detail. Nevertheless his biases are evident. He likes Bultmann; he respects but is somewhat repelled by Barth. He would like to revise history a bit: to play down the enormous influence that Barth, from Bonn and later from Basel, exercised in the church struggle both personally and through his theology, and to play up the quiet but faithful witness throughout the Nazi period of the professor in Marburg. This all has a theological root. Forstman cannot grasp Barth's doctrine of revelation, his rejection of any anthropological correlate save Christ, as anything but arbitrary biblicism. He clearly prefers Bultmann's existentialist hermeneutic. So, though his positions are fairly presented, Barth comes across as something of a suspicious, opinionated dogmatist.

But this misses the fundamental point of the German church struggle. Barth's radical proclamation of the discontinuity between the free word of God and all human structures of culture, desire, or understanding provided the backbone of the Confessing Church's resistance to a deeply seductive nationalist ideology. Long before social analysis, political insight, human conscience or even religious awareness perceived what Hitler was up to, this free word broke into the German situation with its own judgment and promise. Barmen expressed this. Bultmann appropriated and tried to qualify it. Tillich pointed toward it with his Protestant principle. Barth was concerned theologically to guard access to that word from human qualifications and conditions so that it could truly speak, judge, and redeem. It sometimes made him suspicious and opinionated. It also gave his theology a power to liberate Germans—and late twentieth-century Americans—from their cultural captivity, which Forstman acknowledges, but does not quite understand.

Charles C. West
Princeton Theological Seminary

Stone, Ronald H. *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A Mentor to the Twentieth Century*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. xiv + 284. \$21.99.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*. Edited by D. B. Robertson. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. 309. \$13.99.

There has been a rash of controversy over Reinhold Niebuhr during the past few years. How does one capture the character and contribution of a man who defied every category, yet influenced the world of his time and ours as few others have? It began with Richard Fox (*Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*, 1985) and the storm of

protest he evoked, despite his wealth of detail, from those who best knew Niebuhr the person. Ursula Niebuhr came forward with a sensitive portrait of her husband (*Remembering Reinhold Niebuhr*, 1991), drawing upon their correspondence with each other and with their friends. Several others weighed in with their perspectives. Now we have Ronald Stone's definitive analysis.

Stone is uniquely qualified for his task. He was Reinhold Niebuhr's last teaching fellow, an authoritative interpreter of his thought, and a friend of the family. For this book he has drawn on all the archives available: the Library of Congress, Union Seminary, Bethel congregation in Detroit, and even the FBI. He solicited memories and class notes from several hundred of Niebuhr's former students. To them all he has added his own copious resources. The result is a full, detailed, appreciative picture of the whole of Niebuhr's life and career. It is, by Stone's intention, an analytical picture. There is no overall evaluation of Niebuhr's thought and influence. Rather, each relationship is described, each book and significant article placed in the context to which it spoke. What it means that Niebuhr was variously called an Augustinian, a neo-orthodox theologian, a Christian realist, a liberal, a conservative, a socialist, a pragmatist, and many other names, is carefully explored. One may not agree with Stone's judgment on all these relations. I would have liked more emphasis on Niebuhr the theologian in polemical encounter with the liberal pragmatism of John Dewey and Bertrand Russell, for such was the drama at Union Seminary in the 1940s. But one must listen seriously to Stone. He probably knows Niebuhr more comprehensively from within than any other living scholar.

A final note on the title: *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr*. The uniqueness of this book is the picture it gives—reconstructed from class notes and syllabi—of Niebuhr, the teacher of ethics. Here the vast scope of his knowledge, historical and contemporary, comes to light. Here his character as a Christian thinker shines most clearly. This man, in the classroom, the refectory, and the commons, is the one whom generations of students knew and loved.

He is also still with us, in that combination of theological depth and concrete political judgment that was his genius. The collection of shorter writings on *Love and Justice* which first appeared in 1957 has just been reissued in Westminster/John Knox's Library of Theological Ethics. It is a bit of history, but it is not dated. Rather, it is a case study in how one moves between theology and political action then and today. Part I, on the basic relation of love to justice, will engage the reader most directly. But the later sections, on the particular issues of pre- and post-World War II America, are worth exploring in their own right as an exercise in doing political ethics, any time, any place.

Charles C. West
Princeton Theological Seminary

Miller, Donald G. *The Scent of Eternity: A Life of Harris Elliott Kirk of Baltimore*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989. Pp. xvi + 730. \$31.95.

This biography is the story of a singular life, and it is singularly well done. For five decades, Harris E. Kirk was a legend in the religious, civic, and university life of the city of Baltimore, and particularly in the Franklin Street Presbyterian Church where he was minister from 1901 to 1953. Among his close friends—and they included many persons of professional distinction as well as honest-to-goodness laborers—Donald G. Miller was probably the most qualified individual to produce this thoroughly researched account and tribute. A leading New Testament scholar in his own right, Professor Miller of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia possesses the stylistic gifts for the telling of Kirk's story and for making this volume, not merely a catalogue of facts, but the celebration of a life. Himself a preacher, writer, and thinker with books on the Christian pulpit, biblical commentary, and pastoral ministry to his credit, Miller has contributed richly by this volume, not only to the history of preaching in America, but also to the continuing education of younger ministers who have the patience to read carefully through its seven hundred pages. They will find there a mentor in both Miller and Kirk regarding the worthwhileness of Christian ministry.

In the course of twenty-two chapters, Kirk's life is traced from its roots in Middle Tennessee, through straitened vicissitudes of early childhood and youth, into Southwestern Presbyterian University where he practically shaped his own curriculum, and finally into his extraordinary lifetime ministry in the Franklin Street Church in Baltimore. His professional life was almost entirely in one congregation, where the intellectual and theological breadth and depth of his sermons drew consistently large crowds, and in a city where his scholarship was admired by civic and university figures alike, yet his name and reputation were known and appreciated equally in the United States, Great Britain, and the Far East. Miller's list of Kirk's publications, comprising thirteen pages, indicates the extent of his lectureships, monographs, articles, and sermons. Moreover, this book intimates how many times throughout his career Kirk turned a deaf ear to siren calls to other distinguished pulpits and professorships. Indeed, Miller devotes seventy-one pages to this phenomenon alone.

Chiefly, however, this biography sets forth Harris Kirk, the preacher, both directly and indirectly. His pulpit presentations were marked by originality, empathy, and heartfelt rapport, and their substance was illustrated from his avid reading habits and his mastery of the Bible. In this regard, Miller notes "all the gifts of his massive mind, his deep insights into truth, the wealth of his learning and experience, the warmth of his heart" under which "lay a love for men far deeper than many knew" (p. 684).

Miller has given us the story of an era (mid-1870s to mid-1950s) in American church history, especially Presbyterianism and its many controversies, and as well a

general sociological study of the times. His mastery and sorting out of the innumerable details of Kirk's career are exemplary, and the claim of his seven years of research through papers, files, sermons, and other voluminous writings is a tribute in itself. Moreover, Miller's capacity to cast biographical facts in an engaging literary style holds the reader's attention to the end. Any young minister will find here a whole course in practical theology and an exposure, not to theories, but to living principles, which were the hallmark of Kirk's ministry. "Christianity, to him," writes Miller, "was not a religion, one among many, that offered its wares in the marketplace of ideas to be discussed, compared, and evaluated. It rather consists of a series of unique events on the human scene in which God was the chief actor, *doing* something for humanity that it itself was powerless to do" (p. 611). "Preaching is not merely a retelling of the story, but a search in the story for patterns of meaning that throw light on current human existence" (p. 612).

In his preface, Miller declares, "The aim of this volume has been to rescue Dr. Kirk for posterity." If this book doesn't do it, nothing else ever can. Yet we know, as Prime Minister Macmillan said about Winston Churchill in a tribute before the House of Commons, "We shall not see his like again." Is it too faithless to say, "*Et tu Harris Kirk?*"

Donald Macleod
Princeton Theological Seminary

Crouch, Archie R., Steven Agoratus, Arthur Emerson, and Debra E. Soled, eds. *Christianity in China: A Scholars' Guide to Resources in the Libraries and Archives of the United States*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1989. Pp. 750. \$135.00.

This is no pocket handbook, but for any serious academic research in the field of the history of Christianity in China or continental Asia it is absolutely indispensable. This 750-page volume is massive, meticulous, and superbly organized. To anyone who seeks to uncover what resources are available for understanding the twelve centuries of recorded Christian presence in China and the imprint of that presence on the life and culture of a fifth of the population of the world, this will be the research tool of first resort.

The publication of the *Scholars' Guide* is a response, in a way, to a challenge made some years ago to the American academic community by John K. Fairbank of Harvard. He pointed to Christian world missions as an invaluable but too often neglected factor in studies of world history, and issued a call for "historical research of the multi-archival kind" into the influence of Christian missions and the Chinese church on "the rise of modern China."

Encouraged by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, Archie R. Crouch, a long-time Presbyterian missionary and historian in China, and his able team of researchers at Princeton Theological Seminary's Speer Library, surveyed the holdings of more than 1,200 libraries, archives, religious orders, and mission headquar-

ters to locate 554 significant repositories in the United States of source materials on Christianity in China. The initial listings of the collections are geographical, first by state, then by city, and by institutions. California, for example, has 330 listings, New York 385.

Equally valuable is the eighty-page bibliography of serial titles (journals, bulletins, annual reports, etc.) with the names and addresses of institutions where they are preserved.

The guide even includes listings of oral histories collections and of more than 550 dissertations and theses alphabetically cataloged by authors. An eleven-page "bibliography of bibliographies," which will be of particular use for libraries and further research, includes everything from inventories of unpublished manuscripts, library catalogs, archival reports, and geographical dictionaries, to checklists of microfilm reproductions.

The indices alone—a subject index, personal names index, and repository index—cover 168 pages, and bring order out of what otherwise would be an indigestible mass of information. There is even a "place name conversion table" for those who are understandably confused by recent changes in the romanization of Chinese words. Spelling in the text is as given in the repository records, but the conversion table conveniently adds both the classic Wade-Giles spelling, and the "Pinyin" spelling of the People's Republic.

The book is surprisingly easy to use and enormously helpful. The editor, Archie Crouch, modestly describes it as "a beginning," "the tip of a huge iceberg of primary and secondary resources produced by the Christian enterprise in China."

But it is much more. It represents an enormous amount of difficult, time-consuming perseverance in tracking down leads both to known and hitherto hidden collections and of technical bibliographic skill in analyzing and cataloging the findings. It is an unmatched guide to the resource treasures of the history of Christianity in the most important single country in Asia, a work to which coming generations of scholars and researchers will always be indebted.

Samuel Hugh Moffett
Princeton Theological Seminary

Sleeper, C. Freeman. *The Bible and the Moral Life*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. ix + 181. \$14.99.

In recent decades mainline Protestantism has been defined by deep shifts in middle-class American attitudes towards both morality and the Bible. The ethos of bourgeois respectability, which for so long supported church membership, has fallen before leftist social criticism and the new sexual and personal mores of post-sixties America. Among baby boomers, mainline Protestantism is no longer part of a larger social consensus about the good life. With respect to the Bible, the mainline Protestant traditions have undergone equally significant changes. Historical-critical study

of the Bible has fully and completely penetrated seminary education. Lay biblical literacy continues to ebb. Both factors render unworkable the biblical piety that so defined American Protestantism in the past.

The Bible and the Moral Life, by C. Freeman Sleeper, is set within this loss of moral consensus and demise of biblical piety. As a work in biblical studies, *The Bible and the Moral Life* attempts to open up the sacred texts for the contemporary believer. As a work in ethics, this offering by Sleeper tries to indicate a substantive moral basis for a distinctively Christian form of life. That Sleeper fails on both counts is darkly instructive.

Sleeper divides his project into two parts, one concentrating on biblical resources for the moral life and the other on contemporary application. The first part, "Biblical Styles of Moral Reflection," invites the reader into the diverse moral universe of scripture. Here Sleeper succeeds in providing an accessible account of the biblical material that avoids a simplistic compilation of moral principles and platitudes. His focus is upon the distinctive structures of interlocking moral and theological commitments, the "styles" of reflection that are found in the text. These styles are fourfold: Law, Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and Wisdom. In each instance, Sleeper provides the historical context and reminds the reader of the normative content. To context and content Sleeper adds more interesting and useful information about the arguments and authority of each style. Here the reader begins to feel a touch of excitement about the Bible, for the questions of why certain styles predominate in the scriptures and whether those styles ought to occupy our attention today are matters that exercise the contemporary believer. If we could see the purpose and authority of, for example, Law or Apocalyptic, then we might find ourselves tempted to try on these "styles."

Unfortunately, Sleeper's treatments of the arguments and authority of the four styles is too thin. For example, Sleeper reduces prophetic authority to a simplistic conflict of individual versus institution, spirit versus letter. Of the prophets he writes, "They are not interpreters of individual texts. Instead, their authority is that of charismatic individuals, of inspired messengers of God's Word" (p. 53). Such a conclusion ignores the rich possibilities of the prophetic call narratives. For example, in Ezekiel, the Lord commissions the prophet by giving him a scroll that he must eat. Ezekiel's authority would seem, then, to emerge out of a *digestion* of the textual tradition, an immersion in the texts and sacred institutions of Israel, not outside of or in spite of those texts and sacred institutions. This sort of nuance is absent from Sleeper's promising treatments of the arguments and authority of the four styles.

The thinness of Sleeper's biblical invitation is confirmed by the concluding summation of part one. The biblical styles seem to boil down to empty platitudes such as "choose and act responsibly," "resist temptations of secular culture," "dare to open [your] lives to constant renewal by God's spirit," and "the church must be a community of moral discourse" (pp. 100-102). For this we need to read the Bible?

When Sleeper turns to the application of the biblical styles to contemporary

society in part two, "The Bible and Social Policy," the reader begins to wonder if there is any hope for mainline Protestantism. After surveying denominational policy statements on nuclear weapons and abortion, Sleeper can muster no significant moral guidance. His summations work hard to embrace diverse positions. Noting the multitude of positions on nuclear weapons, he concludes, "Thus, the same Bible is used in different ways to arrive, in some cases, at different conclusions" (p. 140). About abortion, he avoids judgment and sums up his vision of the real role of the Bible in this crucial and divisive debate with more empty platitudes: "[The Bible] helps shape our values. It gives us a vision of what human community ought to become. It brings us face to face with God" (p. 154). In view of these considerations, the reader cannot help but conclude that Sleeper's Bible is irrelevant to the pressing moral issues of our day, since it either supports hopelessly diverse and contradictory sets of conclusions or yields nothing but spiritual pieties.

The Bible and the Moral Life provides the reader with neither a biblical vision sufficiently potent to motivate a real desire to read and live in the biblical texts, nor a moral vision sufficiently powerful to serve as a basis for distinctly Christian commitment. Two reasons account for this. First, the historical criticism that Sleeper presupposes in part one is a modern tradition of interpretation that tends to reduce to either expertise or banality. Second, the liberal Protestant worldview that informs Sleeper's efforts in part two is indistinguishable from that of the well-meaning, spiritually sensitive secularist. Is there an alternative? Perhaps the baby boomers who live in the limbo of contemporary society ought to be told something of the one biblical "style" painfully absent from *The Bible and the Moral Life*—the "style" of the man of sorrows, that first-century Palestinian Jew who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, whom the Gospel writers so boldly call "The Son of God" and whose story they tell. For the story is compelling, and the consequences, if taken seriously, would leave little doubt about the distinctiveness of the Christian life.

R. R. Reno
Creighton University

Carmody, Denise Lardner. *Virtuous Woman: Reflections on Christian Feminist Ethics*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992. Pp. x + 182. \$16.95.

The subtitle of this book captures the scope of the work. The author, who is Chair of the Faculty of Religion at the University of Tulsa, offers a series of reflections on the interaction of Christian faith, feminism, and ethics.

The emphasis throughout is clearly on the first member of this trio. Carmody argues that contemporary feminist ethics suffers from its failure to recognize the priority of Christian faith over both feminism and theoretical ethics. She recommends that Christian feminist ethics be "more Christian" (p. ix), that it acknowledge that "the divinity of Christ is the great linchpin of tradition" (p. x), and that its starting point be "wonder at the generosity of the Lord" (p. 6). Carmody attempts to

reestablish the proper balance among the three fields by examining the implications of this Christian perspective for a range of topics studied by feminist scholars. Thus, in separate chapters of the book she reviews commitment and discernment, social ethics, sexual morality, and ecclesiology in light of the preeminence of Christian faith.

These musings, as the author acknowledges, are not intended to be systematic analyses of the issues, but reflections of Christian spirituality. The author's method is to provide lengthy passages from the work of prominent feminists, and then to comment on their adequacy in light of her fundamental criterion, the primacy of Jesus Christ. In tone, Carmody strives to be sympathetic to the viewpoints of her interlocutors, especially to their depiction of women's experience. Yet ultimately her insistence on the primacy of her interpretation of Christian faith over feminism limits her appreciation for a range of writers, non-Christian as well as Christian, who do not share her perspective.

Carmody's treatment of the second and third themes of the book, feminism and ethics, is incomplete. Both subjects are eventually subsumed into Christian spirituality, at some risk to all three fields. Given her thesis, Carmody is obviously critical of non-Christian feminists, because their work, although valuable to her in many ways, lacks the christological dimension. Yet Carmody also challenges the conclusions of explicitly Christian ethicists. Her style of criticism—reflective commentary on limited excerpts from the authors' writings—fails to do justice to those authors' more thorough attempts to understand the complex interaction of Christianity, feminism, and ethics. Her major criticism appears to be that feminists focus their analysis on women's experience as the source of theological and ethical insight, while Carmody prefers a christological starting point. While that criticism may have some merit, Carmody does not reckon sufficiently with the difficulties of her own point of origin for ethics, for example, that ethical norms do not follow automatically from a formal commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. Instead, she prefers to turn away from ethics to spirituality.

Readers who already share Carmody's frustration with feminism's emphasis on the priority of women's experience over christology will appreciate this book. So, too, will readers who agree that spiritual reflection is a more fitting guide to the moral life than sustained ethical analysis. Moreover, readers who assume that the Christian tradition cannot accommodate any feminist commitment will be challenged by Carmody's insistence that Christianity is not only compatible with feminism, but requires it. The book may also be used by readers to identify key themes and key authors in contemporary feminist ethics.

Leslie Griffin
Phoenix, AZ

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992. Pp. 310. \$22.00.

This stimulating book moves toward a theology of earth healing under the headings of Creation, Destruction, Domination/Deceit, and Healing. A chapter in each part explicates familiar themes in Christian tradition, focused by the author's vigorous critique of the ideological biases built into inherited theology that contribute to "distorted" or truncated relationships. The author fosters hermeneutical suspicion of the traditional church teaching that still shapes much Christian belief about creation, judgment, sin/fallenness, and redemption. But that is only half of her agenda. In each part, a companion chapter presents an alternative philosophical or scientific story with which Christian theology should be in dialogue. And each part concludes with suggestions for a more accountable, constructive theology.

A volume with this range of material is more than "ecofeminist," or it certainly broadens the definition of that hybrid term. For Rosemary Radford Ruether is as interested in harmony in and between nations of diverse peoples, and justice toward otherkind, as she is in equality for women. Such a wholistic perspective and posture will not surprise those who already know the author in person or in print. *Gaia & God* presents nuanced and spirited reflections of a cosmopolitan social theologian who views "the work of eco-justice and the work of spirituality as interrelated, the outer and inner aspects of one process of conversion and transformation."

Here "eco-" encompasses ecology and economy, which can become healthy only through right relationship, namely, ecological integrity with social-economic equity. Up front, the author advocates "a reordering to bring about just and loving interrelationships between men and women, between races and nations, between groups presently stratified into social classes, manifest in great disparities of access to the means of life." The concluding chapter suggests practical ways to move in such a direction through base communities of spirituality and resistance.

The problematic being explored is that "classical Western cultural traditions, codified between 500 B.C.E. and 800 C.E., and of which Christianity is a major expression, have justified and sacralized relationships of domination. In particular, the way these cultures have construed the idea of the male monotheistic God, and the relation of this God to the cosmos as its Creator, have reinforced symbolically the relations of domination of men over women, masters over slaves, and male ruling-class humans over animals and over the earth." The "feminist" concern of *Gaia & God* focuses on the realization that "domination of women has provided a key link, both socially and symbolically, to the domination of earth, hence the tendency in patriarchal cultures to link women with earth, matter, and nature, while identifying males with sky, intellect, and transcendent spirit."

But Ruether also wants to recycle "positive insights" in the cultural and religious

tradition, reflecting millenia of collective human efforts to discern life's meaning and live rightly. "These classical traditions did not only sacralize patriarchal hierarchy over women, workers, and the earth. They also struggled with what they perceived to be injustice and sin and sought to create just and loving relations. . . . There are also glimpses in this heritage of transformative, biophilic relationships, . . . a precious legacy that needs to be separated from the toxic waste of sacralized domination."

With this dialectical view of the cultural-religious tradition, Ruether emphasizes that "merely replacing a male transcendent deity with an immanent female one is an insufficient answer to the 'god-problem.'" God is "yet more" and "beyond" what we know through astronomy, ecology, and modern social relations. But today, given what we have learned about the history of this planet, the ecological web of life, and the results of dominating human relations, theology must reformulate its explanation of how the earth as a living system, *Gaia*, relates to the source of the universe, *God*; and, theology must help to clarify the vocation shared by human beings throughout earth community.

Part one examines the classical creation stories (Babylonian, Hebrew, and Greek) that together shaped church tradition, and then looks at post-Newtonian cosmology and earth history. Natural interdependency and reverence for life, rooted in awe and wonder, are dynamic common themes of both stories.

Part two assesses the prophetic but dualistic visions of apocalyptic destruction and salvation that are so prominent in Christian tradition. Then it reviews catastrophic scenarios informed by contemporary science regarding "the 'four horsemen' of destruction—human population explosion at the expense of the plants and animals of earth; environmental damage to air, water, and soil; the misery of growing masses of the poor; and global militarization aimed at retaining unjust advantage over the earth's resources for a wealthy elite." Ruether urges us "not to indulge in apocalyptic despair, but to continue the struggle to reconcile justice in human relations with a sustainable life community on earth."

Part three gives detailed attention to evil in nature and human nature as understood classically and in contemporary "fall stories." The author warns against simplistic myths that are too negative toward classical cultures and too naive about early tribal people. She challenges both mythic rationales for patriarchy and feminist imaginings of pre-patriarchal paradise! Instead, Ruether wants us to deconstruct a mythically reinforced, history-spanning "culture of deceit" that denies gender interdependence, exploits human labor, and destroys the biotic community.

Part four invites us to reclaim, reform, and apply both the covenantal and sacramental traditions as complementary approaches to healing. The covenantal tradition features ethical norms and laws of rightly related earth community; the sacramental tradition "ecstatically experiences the divine bodying forth in the cosmos, and beckons us into communion." The resulting ethical spirituality knows the value

and transience of selves in relation to the great Self, the living interdependence of all things, and the joy of personal communion within the matrix of life.

Dieter T. Hessel
Program on Ecology, Justice and Faith
Princeton, NJ

Nelson, James B. *Body Theology*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. Pp. 216. \$12.99.

We not only *have* bodies, James Nelson (author of *Embodiment* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979]) continues to remind us, we *are* bodies. It is our minds that feel as if they have or possess this thing called "body," even while the body itself directly senses and moves and encounters and breathes. It is precisely this region of experience—bodily being—that Nelson takes up as subject matter for theological and ethical concern. He believes the mind-body relationship (which is too often understood dichotomously) is best viewed as a complementarity. Body theology, accordingly, begins with the concrete, "with the fleshly experience of life—with our hungers and our passions, our bodily aliveness and deadness, with the smell of coffee, with the homeless and the hungry we see on our streets, with the warm touch of a friend, with bodies violated and torn apart in war, with the scent of a honeysuckle or the soft sting of autumn air on the cheek, with bodies tortured and raped, with the bodyself making love with the beloved and lovemaking with the earth" (pp. 42-43). The author takes the incarnation very seriously.

This leads Nelson to explore such varied issues as masturbation, aging, embryos, HIV and AIDS, reproductive choice, and hospital care, for example, doing so with the conviction that grace secures and releases us from the anxieties that might tempt us to reflect upon such matters without heart or reason. The book devotes attention to three general areas as they relate to "body theology"—human sexuality, male issues, and medical issues—and concludes with two of the author's sermons. The overall affirming tone and style of the work will be particularly valuable to those struggling with such complex concerns either personally or as a church or medical professional, or simply as a person in any faith community. Like the complex body itself, Nelson's ethical reflections permit no easy answers or rules or prescriptions for the moral life. In the tradition of Kierkegaard, persons ultimately are thrown back on themselves as they exist before God and neighbor.

There are methodological matters in need of clarification. One is the near equation of the body and sexuality. Sometimes Nelson even uses "sexual theology" and "body theology" interchangeably. Some differentiation between the two might be helpful—sexuality is more than and not reducible to the body, and the body is more than and not reducible to sexuality. The trick, of course, is making the differentiation without losing the intimate connection.

Nelson's understanding of body theology itself is also open to question. Its task, he says, is "critical reflection on our bodily experience as a fundamental realm of the experience of God" (p. 43). Critical reflection as the main task of theology, even upon bodily experience, seems to fall right back into the mind-body split, giving the reflective mind the ultimate say. But in light of the body itself and all its creative, expressive, erotic, dynamic, and painful existence, perhaps conceiving of theology in analytic and reflective categories is far too limiting. Perhaps theology could learn from the body, allowing its task to become as much creatively expressive of the divine-human relationship, as it is critical and reflective. This could help us recover ways of doing theology that are closer to, and flow from, a *posture* of the *heart* to use bodily imagery.

These issues aside, this is a good and sensitive book and could be used in a wide variety of settings and circumstances as comfort to the hurting or as challenge to the comfortable. It is the sort of book you want to discuss with others, putting you in touch with others, and, therefore, it can be a tool for embodying its own theological vision.

Bradley Wigger
Oshkosh, WI

Deck, Allan Figueroa, ed. *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992. Pp. xxvi + 174. \$16.95.

According to government statistics, it is estimated that by the year 2000 the Hispanic/Latino/a community will be the largest minority group in the United States. The cultural and religious influences of this culturally diverse minority will be strongly felt in the major urban areas of the northeastern, southeastern, and southwestern United States. Churches, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, will begin to experience a shift in their constituencies. The Hispanic/Latino/a religious experience will challenge the traditional life and ministry of these churches. The resulting challenge can either be positive for the body of Christ or engender controversy, conflict, and fragmentation in the church.

Wanting the former, Allan Figueroa Deck, author of *The Second Wave: Hispanic Ministry and the Evangelization of Cultures* has compiled and edited *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*. Written by leading Hispanic/Latino/a scholars and theologians (all of whom are members of the Association of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States), the essays provide the reader with extensive descriptions and analyses of the nature of Hispanic/Latino/a Christianity, along with a review of the ongoing struggle of constructing Christian theology from a Hispanic/Latino/a perspective.

Seldom does an anthology of this type achieve balance and consistency. *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, however, accomplishes this difficult task by

concentrating on the main theme of the text, namely, popular religiosity. The authors appropriate the popular religious experience in the Hispanic/Latino/a community and begin the formulation of a theology from the perspective of the Hispanic/Latino/a poor. This option for constructing theology from the popular religious experience of Hispanics/Latinos/as reveals the pastoral-scholarly theological model that is currently emerging from the Hispanic/Latino/a religious context. The writers demonstrate an awareness of the complex socioeconomic context, women's issues, diverse cultural patterns in theology and worship, and official Roman Catholic documentation regarding these themes. The book introduces the reader to the most prominent individuals involved in this theological enterprise among Roman Catholic Hispanic/Latinos/as.

These essays also reveal the stage in which Hispanic/Latino/a theology is found and the claims for a "non centered" pluralistic theological approach. The writers are especially critical of contemporary "liberal individualistic" and "collectivist options" in theological methods. They are also critical of the pluralistic methods that include marginalized theology "into the theological debate, but only as a marginalized theology, or, in common parlance, only as a token" (p. 13). The authors struggle to bring the Hispanic/Latino/a perspective into the main theological discourse.

The theological locus of this book is the dignifying of the Hispanic/Latino/a people and their religious and cultural practices. What they think, what they do, how they worship, and their ethnicity (*mestizo*) become the central themes for the construction of theology, while the official documents of the Roman Church are instruments for the recognition of the people's religious identity. From this perspective, the book reveals a theological strategy of making legitimate the popular over and against what the church has regarded as traditional and acceptable. It is the continual dialogue between tradition and popular religion that informs the reader of the issues that need to be addressed in the church.

Finally, the reader should be aware that the discussion is limited to Roman Catholic popular religiosity in the Hispanic/Latino/a community. Most of this population in the United States is Roman Catholic and faithfully practices what is actually a form of popular religion. Unfortunately, a Protestant perspective of Hispanic/Latino/a theology is not addressed by the writers. This deficiency should not, however, lead Protestants to ignore the book. On the contrary, the broad understanding of the culture presented, and the multitude of trends the writers address, speak to the situation of the Protestant churches as well. This book should be read by all who are concerned about the future ministry of the Christian churches in the United States. It can be a guide for transforming division and controversy into diversity and unity.

Carlos F. Cardoza Orlandi
Princeton Theological Seminary

Peters, Ted. *God—The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. Pp. xv + 384. \$19.95.

Two themes, both of which are reflected in the lengthy title, pervade this book, which is the latest in a recent outpouring from Ted Peters, Professor of Systematic Theology at Lutheran Pacific Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union. The two themes are that the gospel of the resurrected Christ points to God's promised future for the whole creation, and that theologians are called today to explicate this gospel in terms comprehensible to postmodern people.

For Peters, postmodernity is the emerging cultural consciousness, not yet well defined, but clear in its desire to distinguish itself from central features of Enlightenment modernity. Where modernity analyzed parts, postmodernity considers the whole. Where the modern mind stood back with skeptical distance from old dogmas and nonrational authorities, the postmodern mind reconsiders the wisdom of ancient symbols. Where modernity finally deconstructs all doctrines and meanings, postmodern theology seeks to reconstruct doctrines by which to make sense of the world and live in it.

Postmodern theology, Peters believes, is thus permitted to draw upon traditional texts and themes in order to construct a Christian view of things. With the gospel as its material norm and with the Bible as its critical source and formal norm, theology's task is that of "evangelical explication." Theology today is engaged in a contest with "competing worldviews," such as new age thinking. At stake is the right to claim "explanatory adequacy" (p. 74). To justify its claim to this title, theology must meet four criteria: it must be applicable, comprehensive, logical, and coherent. Peters argues further that theology refers to God just as theories in science, according to critical realism, refer to the natural world (p. 75, n. 28).

This illuminating discussion of our cultural situation is followed by a summary of major Christian doctrines. Peters' doctrine of God, like that of many recent theologians, is consistently triune, although he questions the tendency to use the social analogy for the Trinity. While his discussion of recent work in the doctrine of God is brief, he clearly surveys the contributions of Karl Rahner, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Jürgen Moltmann, among others, and agrees with them that the God revealed in Jesus Christ is a God who is genuinely engaged in the creation, open to its traumas, and bearing its suffering. "God, like the course of history itself, is in the process of constituting Godself" (p. 223). Though changing with creation's changes, God remains faithful to God's own identity as loving Creator.

Peters discusses at length the critique offered by some feminist theologians that God as "Father" is associated with oppression of women. Peters rejects this critique, pointing out that both Jesus and the New Testament writers used "Father" in a way that undermined rather than supported the patriarchal culture of their time. I find this argument helpful but not convincing, since men have done quite a lot since Jesus to reestablish the link between "Father" language for God and their oppres-

sion of women. No amount of analysis of the original sources is likely to convince women today that they are mistaken when they claim that there is such a link. Nevertheless, Peters' discussion is thoughtful, fair, and encouraging of more reflection.

Above all, for Peters, God is seen as the power that determines the creation's future. The destiny God is preparing is already disclosed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This theme of prolepsis, for which Peters is indebted to Pannenberg, permeates the discussion of creation, christology, and the Holy Spirit. Peters proposes "the following principle of proleptic creation: God creates from the future, not the past" (p. 134). This distinction is similar to that between efficient and final (or teleological) causality; indeed, Peters speaks of the Spirit as the *telos* of the creation (p. 249). Using terms reminiscent of process philosophy, Peters says that God's creativity is "a pull from the future rather than a push from the past" (p. 136). All this is evocative of the theme of emergence, so widely held by postmodern thinkers. It is not clear whether Peters derives the idea primarily from postmodern sources (such as evolutionary thinking) or from the few theological writers, such as Irenaeus, who hint at it. While proleptic theology is broadly consonant with postmodern consciousness, Peters himself does not explore that consonance.

Knowing of Peters' interest in theology and science, I find it surprising that he is not more explicit about science, especially the theory of evolution. In his discussion of humanity, it is not clear whether he thinks that the soul-like dimension of our humanity is something that emerged through the evolutionary process (if so, how?) or whether it appears in our evolutionary history suddenly and inexplicably, perhaps by a special divine act (and if so, when?). The question is important especially for a proleptic theology, since its answer gives us a way to comprehend the momentous, future transformation that is symbolized by the general resurrection. Is the evolution of human consciousness an example of God having created from the future?

Despite some unexplored areas, *God—The World's Future* is a wonderfully helpful book. It is a necessary supplement to any introductory theology course, and I highly commend it to clergy who must regularly explicate the gospel amid today's culture.

Ronald Cole-Turner
Memphis Theological Seminary

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. Pp. xv + 358. \$24.95.

The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation is a systematic theology of the Holy Spirit, and, by Moltmann's own account, an attempt at a "holistic pneumatology." While this is true in regard to the normal connotations of that description in present

theological discourse, for example, emphasizing the interrelatedness of the bodily, social, political, and environmental dimensions of Christian witness, it is also true with respect to the dogmatic accounting of the faith. Moltmann is at his best when he integrates the concerns of contemporary Christian movements with the richness of the biblical witness and the church's theological tradition in order to produce a stimulating and original dogmatic tract (in the best sense of that genre!).

Dividing this systematic work into three parts, Moltmann moves from a fundamental to a historical to a dogmatic theology of the Holy Spirit. He begins with the operative rubric: "Experiences of the Spirit." Without reducing the Holy Spirit to human experience, Moltmann expands the realm of experience to embrace the reality of the immanent transcendence of God in all things. The stage is then set for the biblical witness to the divine Spirit in creation, covenantal presence, and messianic expectation, a salvation-historical context for the trinitarian manifestation of the Spirit mediated by Jesus Christ. The latter highlights the movement and reciprocity between christology and eschatology with pneumatology as the dogmatic fulcrum. The passage from a Spirit christology (the Synoptics) to a christological doctrine of the Spirit (Paul and John) to an eschatological pneumatology provides the contours for the trinitarian theology for which Moltmann is known.

Part two of the book, "Life in the Spirit," orients the reader to the practical dimensions of pneumatology, including the witness to the presence of the Spirit in the history and life of the church. Here Moltmann attends to the foundation for the Reformed doctrine of the Christian life by following the classical *ordo salutis*. Moltmann's utilization of this dogmatic schema, in concert with the soteriological motif of liberation and his sympathetic reading of pietistic and pentecostal perspectives, is inclusive, insightful, and appealing. His is one of the few attempts by a theologian of stature to integrate the insights and emphases of what in this country would be the liberal, orthodox, and pietistic sectors of Protestant Christianity. For this alone the book is worth reading, as it will challenge theologians, pastors, and lay people from these different streams and could in fact contribute to a new theological dialogue in American Protestantism. Suffice it to say that the soteriological model of liberation as exodus and resurrection establishes the arena in which justification, regeneration, sanctification, charismatic empowerment, and mysticism are considered. This pneumatological recovery of the *ordo salutis* avoids both pietistic privatization and the sometimes spiritual anemia of theological liberalism.

Moltmann concludes his work by taking on the constructive dogmatic task that refers to "The Fellowship and Person of the Holy Spirit." After reviewing the social and communal dimensions of the experience of the Spirit, he attempts to identify what the "personhood of the Spirit" may mean. Moving from metaphor to definition ("*the loving, self-communicating, out-fanning and out-pouring presence of the eternal life of the triune God*") to dogma ("In his trinitarian inter-personhood he is person"), Moltmann brings his "contribution" to a not unexpected completion in a eucharistic and doxological trinitarian vision. Although he only briefly reviews his

revision of the *filioque* (already essayed in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*), Moltmann leaves us with an original and informed Protestant pneumatology ripe for ecumenical conversation.

Ralph Del Colle
Barry University

Browning, Don S. *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. Pp. xii + 324. \$29.95.

There can be little doubt that Don Browning, Professor of Religion and Psychological Studies at the University of Chicago, is the major theorist in practical theology's current search for an identity. Thus the importance of this book in which he draws together many of his earlier themes under a basically hermeneutical approach to practical theology. Moreover, he focuses this approach on three congregational studies which helpfully give his considerable theoretical work institutional concreteness and personal substance. The congregations are: The Wiltshire Methodist Church and the Church of the Covenant (which already appear in the literature on congregational studies) and the Apostolic Church of God (which is Browning's own case).

Although there are many ways to read this wide-ranging and many-sided text, I believe it may be most helpful to review it from back to front. The last chapter, entitled "Transformation," seems to epitomize in one theme the work of the whole. The movement of Browning's hermeneutical approach is transformational in character as it moves through three fundamental phases: 1) Practice ("present theory-laden practice"); 2) Theory (normative theory-laden practice); 3) Practice (critically held theory-laden practice). In this three-step movement, there is a transformation of practice as it progresses from phase one to phase three. Moreover, transformation may take place in various ways to different levels within each of these steps to effect the transformation implicit in the process as a whole. As Browning finally develops it, his transformational view of hermeneutics in practical theology gathers up "the bits and pieces" of his own preceding discussion even as it pulls together many of the scattered themes and divergent viewpoints that appear in the related, but less comprehensive, literature emerging in this field.

In reading this book, one should note first that Browning is not restricting his position to a subfield; for him all theology is through and through practical. Indeed, somewhat reminiscent of Lonergan's move from a prepatterned epistemology to a theological curriculum (*Method in Theology*), Browning's three-step process is not only the outline of this book but it is meant to cover the entire theological curriculum. It begins in phase one with "descriptive theology" in which one seeks, in the context of practice, a "thick description" of the situation by indwelling it with sensitivity to one's own "prejudices" as well as to what the situation itself discloses. Thus, at the outset, Browning himself seeks to give a description of the three congregations and their practices of ministry. In phase two, where practical theology

is critical and normative, the practitioner brings historical, philosophical, theological, and ethical studies to bear on all dimensions of human action within the situation as described. In phase three, the practitioner does "strategic practical theology." That is to say, one brings practice as operative in the original situation to a new level where it is critically, systematically, and historically informed and ethically responsible. At various points in his discussion, Browning's developing position enables him to compare, contrast, and critique ministry in the three congregations and to assess how his hermeneutical approach applies.

Second, note that there is at the core of this process the same methodology and multidimensional analysis of practical reason as in earlier works. The revised critical-correlation approach is operative to bring about a coherent relationship between theology and culture that attempts to be faithful to both. In earlier works, his correlational methodology was very much in the forefront, but here it has become a working part of the multidimensional and transformational sweep of the hermeneutical process.

Third, the dominant hermeneutical approach in this text is Gadamerian up to the issue of validity claims. That is, Browning notes that Habermas and Bernstein have criticized Gadamer for being traditionalist and having no method for testing the "fusion of horizons" that emerges from the hermeneutical process. Browning wants to develop criteria for testing the practical validity claims of the Christian faith. This test he sees as the task of theological ethics. That is to say, transformation is not complete with the insights that allow one to reenvision the situation and one's place in it. They must stand the test of ethical coherence and pragmatic implementation in a way that is both theologically sound and behaviorally relevant. Here, as elsewhere, Browning exemplifies his position with a critical discussion of Reinhold Niebuhr's agape ethic.

Fourth, "strategic practical theology" enacts practice as reconceived and critically maintained. However, it does so not as if it had finalized the answer but with the recognition that this is a recurrent phase in the cumulative transformational process by which persons may expect to progress in "wisdom" in the conduct of Christian ministry.

In this reading of Browning's work, I have stressed the transformational hermeneutic that seems to pervade the book. However, the text is not a Hegelian *tour de force*. Rather it is saturated with critical and constructive responses to a wide variety of philosophers, theologians, ethicists, social and behavioral scientists, and figures in the several subdivisions of practical theology as we now know it (e.g., Christian education, pastoral counseling, homiletics, and liturgics). Browning listens carefully to his critics and to those whose work in anyway impinges on the emerging identity of this field. It is partly in response to some who have said his work is too theoretical or didactic that he has used three case studies and has taken up a hermeneutical approach that includes, but subordinates, earlier work to a critical appropriation of

Gadamer. This is all to say that this important work does not stand alone but is, as he says, part of an ongoing dialogue, and it is through dialogue broadly conceived that transformation continues to occur. This work is unfinished in many ways, but it is in my opinion the best statement yet of the patterns and constituents that pertain to dialogue about practical theology.

To continue the dialogue, certain queries about what is fundamental must be put to Browning. For all of Browning's rich engagement with various figures in the field, a fundamental anthropological position seems to be ever present but always eluding direct discussion. This apparently uninvited guest continually forces the question as to what view of humanity is being assumed by the theological, hermeneutical, ethical practitioner? Whose anthropological position (Clifford Geertz? Robert Bellah? Max Weber? Talcott Parsons? Reinhold Niebuhr? All of these? Others?) is presupposed here? Theoretical thinking in practical theology, however it may be conceived, must eventually come to terms with this matter on a level similar to Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Otherwise, the meaning of institutions (e.g., congregations), transformation as a process, the role of theology in shaping history, and similar major themes will remain anthropologically adrift, and practical theology will never really get down to fundamentals.

Second, Browning refers to Talcott Parsons' arenas of human action as personality, society, and culture. Actually, Parsons' system has four major arenas of human action including the organic or biological. This would be an insignificant correction if it did not suggest a more pervasive issue: Where is the deep embodiment of spiritual life in this discussion? Why does that spiritually intense woman, "Helen Barnes," in the Apostolic Church of God, seem more convictionally real, more profoundly present, more embedded in the immediate historical situation than any one else in this book? To his credit, Browning seems to suggest that this was precisely the case, but should not such embodiment pervade practical theology? Feminists have pointed to the necessity for an embodied theology in which the organic basis of life and thought issues in political action. But even more fundamental, the biblical view of humanity is profoundly linked to the body, both individual and corporate. It is even arguable that the whole of Pauline theology may turn on the profound distinction between *sarx* and *soma*.

Third, this leads to the fundamental theological issue that surfaces repeatedly because it is almost possible to read this book as a work in social philosophy. For example, though the Barthian influence is acknowledged through figures such as George Lindbeck, a Barthian stereotype as the "theory to practice" opposite of Browning's position is all we see of Barth, and this, of course, is dismissed as essentially out-of-touch and out-of-date. This may seem to be required by the critical-correlational method; however, a careful reading of the powerfully constructed deep-running coherence of Barth's theology relevant to congregational life would

yield a different picture. It would describe a profound relational reality that grounds transformation in the person and work of the Holy Spirit on the one hand and in the life of the church on the other. My hunch is that the so-called "thick description" of the three congregations Browning investigated, especially the Apostolic Church of God, would have been enhanced if the Barthian approach—or even Moltmann's concept of "the church in the power of the Spirit"—had been permitted more fully to inform the inquiry.

The integrity of the theological aspect of Browning's methodologies is at issue here. Even Pannenberg, who was at some pains to separate himself from Barth's position for carefully considered reasons similar to Browning's, does not neglect to reinterpret his anthropological findings (in organic life, identity formation, society, and the meaning of institutions and cultures) in biblical and theological categories emphasizing the Spirit of the triune God. If Browning's work is theologically informed primarily by some version of process thought, or if he considers his position to be *sui generis*, then we need to know that. Whatever the theological moorings of practical theology in Browning's thought, it is essential that the central doctrines in the Christian tradition be openly addressed, not subsumed too quickly under a hermeneutical process without further scrutiny.

This latest work by Browning is an extremely challenging text in practical theology, and his is surely the strongest theoretical voice in our day. However, the current groundswell of interest and the proliferation of fresh points of view in this field are just beginning to take shape, both nationally and internationally. This is in no small part due to Browning's leadership. But where the dialogue will take us, where it will leave this study, and how Browning's own mind may change, remain to be seen.

James E. Loder
Princeton Theological Seminary

Chapman, Audrey R. *Faith, Power, and Politics: Political Ministry in Mainline Churches*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991. Pp. 209. \$15.95.

Audrey Chapman is a remarkable person—a woman of three careers. In her first career she earned all the credentials as a political scientist—Ph.D.; research in Kenya, Ghana, and other African countries; and plenty of publications. Meeting a "more vital Christianity" in Africa, she was "converted" to a deeper Christian commitment. That turned her to her second vocation in U.S. denominational and interdenominational agencies concerned with public issues. Her growing theological interest led her to an M.Div., ordination, and an S.T.M. Meeting with Christians in other countries, she found their acceptance of suffering and martyrdom a contrast with the ways of the religious bureaucracies in which she worked. Disappointed with American churches in their mission to society, she turned to her third vocation

as director of the Science and Human Rights Program of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Chapman's charge is that our churches do not take their faith seriously. Their biblical and theological grounding is minimal. Their social action is usually an imitation of secular agencies, but less thorough and less strategically effective. Denominational staff persuade their church assemblies or synods to give perfunctory endorsement to activities for social justice, but the membership goes its own way, uninfluenced by such formal stands.

Her remedy is that the churches should first clarify their own faith and seek to make their own life consistent with their faith. Rather than a lot of piecemeal sorties into issues defined by Washington, they should establish their own identities, radical commitments, lifestyles, and agendas. From that would flow efforts to move the world in the direction of the reign of God.

The peculiar fascination of the book is that a gifted writer and practitioner, trained educationally and professionally in "political realism," has become the incisive critic of the "realism" that she finds in the churches. She scores points against the prevalent "consumerist approach to religion" and the theological thinness that make the denominations into holding companies for a variety of interest groups, all trying to get ecclesiastical legitimation for their agendas. Those groups, she says, have little impact on the membership or the body politic, as shown by many surveys of voting patterns of "mainline" Protestants.

Chapman wryly acknowledges her own errors in assuming that the adoption of policies by churches implies an intention to carry them out. Critics may ask whether she can make plausible her own combination of a sectarian ethic (in a Troeltschian, nonpejorative sense) and a Calvinist desire to influence society. But such a question does not remove the sting from her book.

Roger L. Shinn
Union Theological Seminary

Imbens, Annie, and Ineke Jonker. *Christianity and Incest*. Translated by Patricia McVay. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. Pp. xxiii + 298. \$14.95.

Annie Imbens, a pastoral theologian, and Ineke Jonker, a feminist historian, both from the Netherlands, report on the religious experiences of ten women survivors of incest. This heuristic study was designed to see how their "functional theology" helped or hindered them in coping with abuse. All the survivors reported that the impact of their religious upbringing was primarily negative. The authors suggest that these women were able "to put into words the humiliation and denial of all women in Christian churches. The plea of women to put an end to sexism within and outside the church is reinforced by the words of Christian incest survivors" (p. 6).

Without exception, the survivors as adults rejected the negative *images of women* in the Bible they had been taught as children. On the one hand, they were supposed to be pure, innocent, and subservient, like Mary, the mother of Jesus. On the other hand, they were labeled seductive, sinful, and evil, like Eve, who tempted Adam and introduced sin into the world. "I knew I should be stoned," said one survivor (p. 217).

With respect to *images of God*, most survivors identified God with the abuser. "God the Father has such almighty power that it's frightening. My father and God were a lot alike" (p. 41).

Given the negative and conflicting images of women, and their responsibility to an all-loving Father-God, religion for these incest survivors meant that men are closer to God than women; that the proper relationship of women to men is subservience; and, that the traditional values of submission and obedience are the essence of Christian faith and practice.

Anticipating resistance to their negative conclusions, Imbens and Jonker suggest that when women describe their experiences with God as oppressive, pastors typically say, "But what you're describing isn't God! That is a false god. That is what some people have made of God" (p. 278). The authors caution that this defensive response only reinforces the silencing forced upon many women in the church.

However, the importance of this study is not just that the survivors have had negative experiences with the church and its theology, but that they are providing validation for a debate within womanist and feminist theology in recent years, namely, whether God the Creator can be understood in any way other than patriarchal, and whether Jesus can be redemptive for women within a patriarchal church (See Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989]). The witness of these survivors does not give much hope for a revival of traditional doctrines of God and christology.

In my opinion, Imbens and Jonker have made a major contribution to the research on incest and child sexual abuse and the potentially destructive aspects of Christian theology. They convincingly illustrate how patriarchal theology with its theme of an all-perfect God who demands obedience and submission from children actually duplicates the inequality and oppression between men and women and between adults and children. They provocatively imply that incestuous fathers are actually loyal to the deep mythic structure of Christianity. If this is true, then contemporary theology itself must be reexamined in order to bring justice for children and women who are raped and abused. This is a troubling book, but one that must be read by anyone in the church concerned about sexual abuse.

James Poling

Colgate Rochester/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary

Peterson, Eugene H. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Leominster, England: Gracewing, 1992. Pp. 197. \$18.95.

Using the story of Jonah as his central metaphor, Eugene H. Peterson offers a stunning critique of what he calls career idolatry. By this he means seeing oneself on an upward path of advancement to fields of "wider service." Peterson offers the suggestion that pastors should stay put where they are and drop the notion that they can escape their problems or find greater happiness by going elsewhere. Tarshish represents false images of those places that lure pastors to visions of more glamor, more prestige, more excitement, what he labels "ecclesiastical pornography." In dramatic contrast to our culture and church patterns, he boldly affirms "the congregation is not a job to be abandoned when a better offer comes along" (p. 21). Peterson calls attention to the fact that pastors are uniquely liable to religious careerism in the illusion that they are doing good, when what they are really doing is seeking to be in control of their own lives.

He offers an alternative vision of ministry as vocational holiness that is "biblically spiritual—rooted and cultivated in creation and covenant, leisurely in Christ, soaked in Spirit" (p. 5). This vision includes a vision of the pastoral task as holy and the people as special and exciting. He compares his vocation as pastor with that of James Joyce as a writer. He writes, "One day while reading *Ulysses*, at about page 611, an earthquake opened a fissure at my feet and all my assumptions of ordinariness dropped into it. All those routines of the pastoral vocation suddenly were no longer 'routines.' " He now sought to see his people with the same imagination and insight that Joyce used to see Leopold Bloom (p. 125).

He lays out a basic rule of life that can nourish a genuine vocational spirituality. This rule is grounded in Lord's Day worship and daily praying of the Psalms and includes recollected prayer, which is spontaneous and specific. Once this basic rule is in place, then we are encouraged to add from among the fourteen disciplines, which he lists as spiritual reading, spiritual direction, meditation, confession, bodily exercise, fasting, Sabbath keeping, dream interpretation, retreats, pilgrimage, almsgiving (tithing), journaling, sabbaticals, and small groups. This reader wishes that Peterson had given at least a sentence of description of each of these disciplines but that is probably for another forthcoming manuscript. Because we are all different, he says "we must develop expertise so that we can call up any one of the disciplines as it is needed and set it aside when it is no longer needed" (p. 108).

This is vintage Eugene Peterson! He writes with the passion, wit, beauty, and fire that have characterized each of his previous books. Yet there is something unique about this book; Peterson seems more comfortable with his double identity: "I saw that alongside and intertwined with being a pastor I was also a writer. My vocation was bipolar" (p. 48). When he describes his literary hero, Dostoyevsky, he seems autobiographical: "He spurned the fads and went for the jugular. He didn't fit. . .

But he created. He lived immersed in passion. He lived expectant of God. And he did this *vocationally*, making a calling out of passion and God" (p. 67).

Sometimes Peterson is given to overstatement and then has to moderate his position. This can be disconcerting to readers, but it is guaranteed to get and hold our attention. *Under the Predictable Plant* is great reading! I found myself disappointed when it came to an end. It was full of lines and phrases that made me say to myself, "Why couldn't I have said that?" Every pastor will be challenged, and perhaps shocked, by Peterson's view of vocational holiness. Perhaps this one line demonstrates it most: "The alternative to acting like gods who have no need of God is to become contemplative pastors" (p. 114).

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